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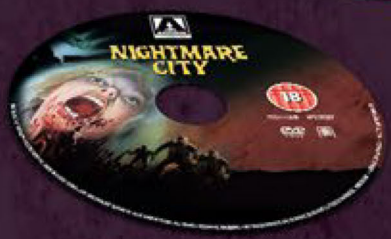

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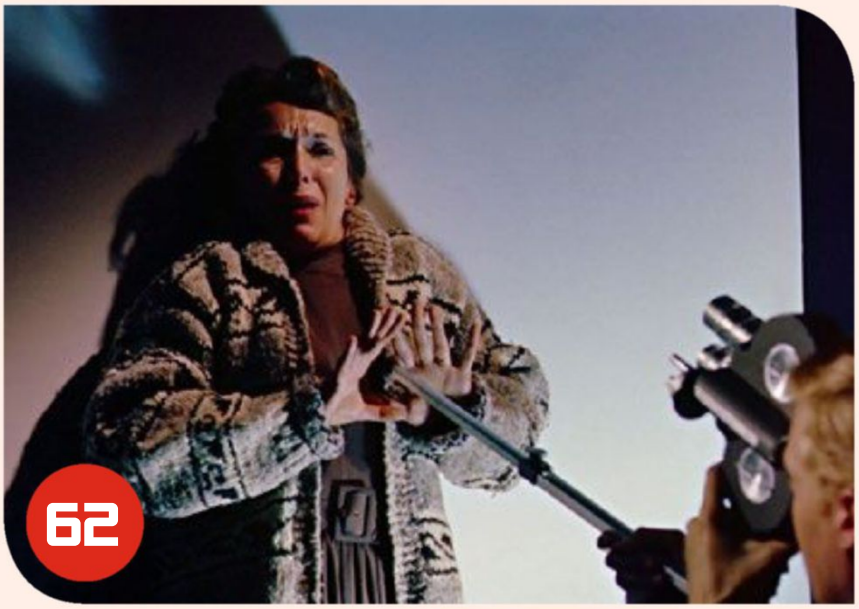

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REGULARS

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EDITORIAL

Editor
JORDAN "MIKE" ROYCE
jordan.royce@starburstmagazine.com

Assistant Editor
MARTIN UNSWORTH
martin.unsworth@starburstmagazine.com

Honorary Editor-in-Chief
DEZ SKINN

Online Editor
ANDREW POLLARD
andrew.pollard@starburstmagazine.com

Sequential Art Editor
ED FORTUNE
ed.fortune@starburstmagazine.com

Audio Drama Editor
TONY JONES
antony.jones@starburstmagazine.com

Editorial Assistants
KIERON MOORE, JACK BOTTOMLEY

ART

Collectors' Edition Cover Artist
MARK REIHILL
markreihill.com

Art Director
JORDAN "MIKE" ROYCE
jordan.royce@starburstmagazine.com

Assistant Art Director
SHAUNA ASKEW
shauna.askew@starburstmagazine.com

Assistant Designer
JON ROBERTS

Intern
SARAH HINGLEY

ONLINE

Webmaster
JIM BOON
jim@starburstmagazine.com

THE GREATEST WRITING TEAM IN THE UNIVERSE

Head Writer
PAUL MOUNT
paul.mount@starburstmagazine.com

Lead Writers
LIVVY BOOTE, JACK BOTTOMLEY, DOMINIC CUTHBERT, KATE FATHERS, ED FORTUNE, JOEL HARLEY, CHRIS JACKSON, CHRISTIAN JONES, TONY JONES, JOHN KNOTT, ANDREW MARSHALL, IAIN MCNALLY, KIERON MOORE, MARTIN UNSWORTH STUART MULRAIN, ROBIN PIERCE, ANDREW POLLARD, LEE PRICE, IAIN ROBERTSON, CALLUM SHEPHARD, JR SOUTHALL, NICK SPACEK, ADAM STARKEY, JOHN TOWNSEND, PETE TURNER

Contributors
TOM ACTON, JONATHAN ANDERSON, SOPHIE ATHERTON, JENNIE BAILEY, VANESSA BERBEN, PHIL BERESFORD, SIMON BESSON, NICK BLACKSHAW, FORD MADDOX BROWN, LARA BROWN, P.M. BUCHAN, MARTYN CONTERIO, TONY COWIN, ALISTER DAVISON, SPLEENY DOTSON, JD GILLAM, ANIMAL JOHNS, ROBERT KEELING, ROD MCCANCE, NEIL MCNALLY, FRED MCNAMARA, HAYDEN MEARS, CHRISTOPHER MORLEY, ANDREW MUSK, PADDY O'HARE, DR KAREN OUGHTON, WARRICK HORSLEY, RYAN POLLARD, PAUL RISKER, LAURA ROBINSON, GRANT KEMPSTER WHITNEY SCOTT-BAIN, DANIEL SEDDON, KAL SHANAHAN, JON TOWLSON, LEONA TURFORD, RICHARD THOMAS, SCOTT VARNHAM, NIGEL WATSON, SAMANTHA WARD, DAVID WHALLEY, IAN WHITE, THOMAS WINWARD, ZACK THE ZOMBABY

AND TETSUO... THE FEARLESS REPTILE GUARDIAN OF STARBURST HQ!

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PRESS

Press Liaison
PHIL PERRY
phil.perry@starburstmagazine.com

PLEASE SEND ALL PRESS RELEASES TO:
press@starburstmagazine.com

REVIEW MATERIALS

Please send all review materials to:
STARBURST MAGAZINE
PO BOX 4508
MANCHESTER
M61 0GY

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STARBURST PUBLISHING
2nd Floor, 60 Portland Street,
Manchester M1 4QT
0161 228 2332

EDITORIAL

Welcome to STARBURST Issue 416.

This amazing year for genre cinema continues unabated as yet another movie shoots straight into the top tier of my films of the year so far. Which one? Well you need to read **It's Only A Movie** and all will be revealed. Sadly in the same column, the abysmal Sam Worthlessness gets replaced as my least favourite actor currently alive. The King is dead, long live the King! Get to the back of the mag and find out what's been going on...

With autumn approaching, it is becoming a ritual that we feature everyone's favourite Gallifreyan. Now it's been a bit divisive in the land of **Who** lately, mainly due to the mixed feelings in many quarters over the tenure of Mr Steven Moffat. So we celebrate the return, but also look at some of the reasons why not everyone is happy of late. The legend that is Paul Mount will be examining why the fairytale aesthetic is not sitting well with everyone. We also catch up with the progress on those pesky missing episodes, and wonder whether we will one day get to watch the first ever regeneration, and get to actually see Patrick Troughton take on the Daleks for the very first time.

Now Robin Pierce has been wanting to cover the amazing **Lost in Space** TV series pretty much from the moment I took over as Editor. Finally, he has been let off the leash and he takes you on a 50th anniversary retrospective of the highs and lows (*cough* Carrot Monster *cough*) of the Space Family Robinson.

Fear the Walking Dead may be a very shit title, but we don't care and still want to see it, so that is featured in this issue as well. As is a little film you may have heard of called **Star Wars: The Force Awakens**. We get up to date with what we know so far.

It's a jammed packed mag, also featuring previews of the upcoming **Legend**, telling (again) the story of London hard nuts **The Krays** (with two Tom Hardy's!), M. Night Shyamalan's **The Visit** and all of your regular faves for your delectation.

STARBURST RADIO may be on its summer hiatus until late September but you can stay in touch with myself **@JordanMRoyce**, Martin **@liverecs** and Shauna **@shaunathegrinch** on Twitter, and also watch out for surprise Podcasts on iTunes.

Also, the podcast is a finalist in the UK Podcasters Awards, and voting is open until August 31st, and you can do your duty by heading over to **newmediaeurope.com**.

Until next issue,
keep watching the weird and wonderful,

Jordan Royce
EDITOR

Buy directly from STARBURSTMAGAZINE.COM and choose from our **Collectors' Edition** cover or **Newsstand** cover.

FEEDBACK

You can write to STARBURST via snail mail:
STARBURST MAGAZINE, PO Box 4508, Manchester, M61 0GY
or email: **letters@starburstmagazine.com**

STAR LETTER

CINEMATIC IMMORTALITY
I really enjoyed reading Ed Fortune's tribute to the late, and much missed, Sir Christopher Lee (Issue 415); it perfectly encapsulated the actor's monumental appeal to his many, many fans.

When Sir Christopher appeared in such Hammer classics as THE CURSE OF FRANKENSTEIN and DRACULA, he was compared (both predictably and unfairly) with Karloff and Lugosi; but he had a much, much wider range (and therefore appeal) than those legendary actors; a far better comparison nowadays would surely be with John Wayne, or better still, Toshiro Mifune; in other words, he has attained true cinematic immortality, a fact which makes the earlier criticisms seem absolutely facile and pointless.

I shall always remember the truly startling moment when he removes his mask of bandages in THE CURSE OF FRANKENSTEIN (I first saw the film on BBC2 in 1979, when it was part of a double-bill with DOCTOR X); it is quite right that Peter Cushing has been dutifully praised for his brilliant portrayal of Baron Frankenstein, but Lee's performance was equally important to the success of that film – he is both the most sinister, yet the most tragic, of all the 'Hammer Creatures.' And it is perfectly true and fair to say that his was easily the finest portrayal of Stoker's 'Vampiric Count'. The scene when he has a conversation with Jonathan Harker (John Van Eyssen) about Lucy (Carol Marsh) is memorable because it feels just like a normal conversation between two people – something which I've never seen in any other DRACULA film, before or since.

But the qualities which Sir Christopher brought to DRACULA (the dignity, the charm, the courage, and the pathos) can also be seen in countless of his other roles as well; in some cases, I found he was often the best thing in a film (his earliest movie – the recently released CORRIDOR OF MIRRORS – features him in a very small, but nonetheless eye-catching performance. The mark of a true star).

The King (of horror, science fiction, fantasy – and much, much more besides) is dead. Long live the King!

Pierre Caspersz, via EMAIL

Well said, you sum it up perfectly, Pierre.

Sir Christopher Lee always brought gravitas to the wonderful roles he played. We can look back fondly, and future generations will be able to enjoy his varied work. He will never be forgotten, especially if we have anything to do with it.

"Once again, their plans for the evening were foiled."

Winner: Alec McQuay. Head over to www.starburstmagazine.com to enter this month's caption contest.

TOO MUCH BASAL.
I listened to your radio show live for the first time this week. I usually catch up on podcasts but thought I would listen out for Rebecca Foster on the news as I always find her voice incredible when you include sound bites of her basal twang. I've stopped buying DOCTOR WHO Magazine and SFX as on the dole at present but still buying your mag each month as it is a quality product!

Stuart Green, via EMAIL

Well the dole *is* for essentials, and well we do provide you with all of your 5-a-day; cult, sci-fi, horror, fantasy and entertainment!

MAN FROM 11TH CENTURY
As a curious first time buyer of your esteemed publication, I was highly impressed with the depth of your insight into the marvellous MAN FROM U.N.C.L.E. TV series of the 1960s (Issue 415). It cannot be underestimated what impact that programme made on audiences of the period, from the badges, books and toys. David McCallum was known as the fifth Beatle, he became THAT popular. Of course, those toys would be worth a fortune now, but it was an incredible time for children who were growing up in the 1960s. As you accurately noted, the BATMAN TV show played an unwitting part in the demise in many programmes by introducing an element of camp, and TMFU was no exception. Arguably, after THUNDERBALL, the spy genre became more fantastical, notably with the Matt Helm and Flint films. Only CALLAN brought things down to earth again, but that brilliant series was an exception to the rule. The lovely tribute to the late great Patrick Macnee was also much appreciated, easily the best dressed man to ever grace the small screen, and one of my childhood heroes.

With Jason Bourne, the entire genre has been totally revamped and now most movie thrillers try to follow that format. THE INCREDIBLES is easily the best example, apart from being a great film in its own right. As for MISSION IMPOSSIBLE, it has become sheer spectacle. The other article on SF programmes of the 1960s was also superb, I was left speechless by the sheer variety of forgotten gems mentioned. Does anybody remember SPACE PATROL and CATWEAZLE?

I can now see why STARBURST is the world's longest running publication of cult entertainment.

Keep up the sterling work.

Rob Jones, Huntingdon.

Do we *remember* CATWEAZLE??... We're still having nightmares about him!

ON A ROLL
After reading the excellent *Roll for Damage* section of the magazine, my husband picked up BLACK FLEET for the family. It also prompted him to start dressing like Johnny Depp in PIRATES OF THE CARIBBEAN. Thanks for that, from the bottom of my heart, you've made me very happy.

Katy, via EMAIL

Shiver me timbers! Do you mean dressing up as Jack Sparrow to play BLACK FLEET, or for other activities which involve more than one player?

AGENTS OF PEEL
Great issue! I never knew that Patrick Macnee and Christopher Lee went to the same school. Spooky that they died so close to each other. Well done on giving the *proper* AVENGERS some coverage, though it needed more pictures of Emma Peel. Your *Agents of Acronym* story blew my mind - ORION was a part of WEB!!! I used to play that game at school. Apparently all my old mates knew, and I never twigged. Biggest revelation since Luke Skywalker's Dad came forward.

Loving the comic strips, columns and reviews, guys (and girls). Keep up the Good Work.

Freddie 'Wookie' B, via EMAIL

Have a lookie at this, Mr Wookie...

THINGS TO COME

A ROUND-UP OF THE BEST (AND WORST) OF THIS MONTH'S MOVIE / TV NEWS

ÉLODIE YUNG

MARVEL

With **Ant-Man** having brought Marvel's Phase Two to a close, all MCU attention is now focused firmly on the next batch of films. Up first is **Captain America: Civil War**, which is to herald the arrival of the *new* Spider-Man. We found out last month that **The Impossible**'s Tom Holland is our new Webhead, but now we're starting to get some details on Spidey's first MCU solo movie.

Believed to be the first of a new trilogy tentatively titled **Spectacular Spider-Man**, Oscar winner Marisa Tomei has been cast as this universe's version of May Parker. Peter's faithful Aunt has often been depicted as younger and more hip in the comics of recent years, and this casting certainly suggests that the cinematic little old Aunt May is going to be getting a spruce up for the big screen. Now whilst that casting is confirmed, an interesting image has been doing the rounds which claims to know *who* Marvel and Sony want for their Spider-Man franchise in terms of both actors and characters. First up, the villains of Spidey's first MCU solo adventure are believed to be Vulture and Scorpion, with Billy Zane up for the Adrian Toomes gig and **American Pie**'s Jason Biggs up for Mac Gargan. Elsewhere, Rachel G. Fox is wanted to play Mary Jane Watson, Timothée Chalamet (himself up for the Spider-Man role at one point) is in talks for Harry Osborn, Sami Gayle is wanted for Liz Allen, Jacob Latimore is in line for Flash Thompson, Miranda Cosgrove (yes, one of the kids from **School of Rock** – she's now very much an adult, which will remind you just how old you're getting) is up for Betty Brant, and **Teen Wolf**'s Tyler Posey is in talks for Ned Leeds. Other casting rumours claim that the duo of Hugh Laurie and Forest Whitaker are in negotiations for the pair of J. Jonah Jameson and Robbie Robertson, respectively. Bar the casting of Tomei, all of the above is mere speculation at this stage, although it does come from reputable sources. Even if some of the above *don't* get cast in the aforementioned roles, the actor and character names mentioned should give you some indication of which direction Marvel and Sony are looking to take the Wallcrawler when his new solo adventure hits screens on July 28th, 2017. Before that, Spidey will make a brief appearance in the Russo Brothers' **Captain America: Civil War**, which is released on May 6th, 2016.

Whereas Spider-Man is trying on the iconic red and blue duds ahead of his impending MCU debut, there's another familiar face who could be in line to get reinvented for the Marvel Cinematic Universe. That man is Blade. The character was last seen cinematically in 2004's **Blade: Trinity**, but star Wesley Snipes has recently talked up a possible return for the Daywalker. The details are sketchy at this point, although Snipes has confirmed that he's met with Marvel for discussions on a number of topics, including the **Blade** franchise. Whether that means a **Blade 4** or an appearance from the character in an already established movie or television Marvel property remains to be seen. As ever though, expect to hear more on any Blade developments as and when they develop.

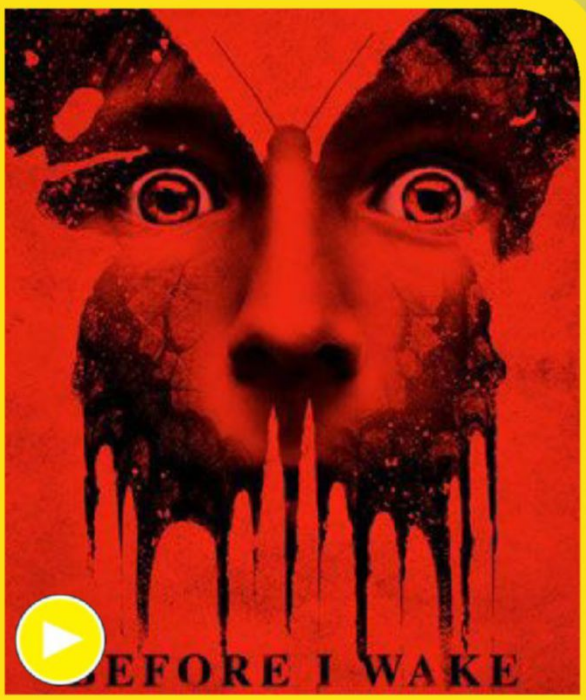
Switching over to 20th Century Fox's Marvel properties, it's been a rough old month on that front. If Josh Trank's **Fantastic Four** bombing wasn't bad enough (we did warn you...), there was also a bit of a scare for the studio's **Gambit** plans. The Remy LeBeau-centric movie has long had Channing Tatum attached to star in its titular role. Well it turns out that Tatum hadn't officially signed a contract for the film, with stories earlier this month claiming that he was actually gearing up to walk away from this X-Men spin-off. Luckily for Fox, Tatum has now finally signed a deal to star and produce, although it's been confirmed that there were a few sticking points during the process. With the **Magic Mike** star now on board to swing his magical staff, it's also been revealed that the female lead of the film will be Bella Donna Boudreaux. The character has a complicated past with Gambit, with the two having been involved in an arranged marriage to appease the New Orleans Assassins' Guild. Soon after, Remy would scarper, leaving a vengeful Boudreaux to develop her own plasma-based powers. Nobody has been cast in the Bella role at this stage, although **SPECTRE**'s Léa Seydoux, **Mission: Impossible – Rogue Nation**'s Rebecca Ferguson and **Mad Max: Fury Road**'s Abbey Lee are the current frontrunners. To be directed by **Rise of the Planet of the Apes**' Rupert Wyatt, **Gambit** is currently pencilled in for an October 7th, 2016 release.

Sticking with the X-Men, the FOX network is still planning to develop a live-action show based on the famed mutants. CEO Dana Walden this month confirmed that the show is still happening, with the network in talks with Marvel at the moment and an official announcement expected soon. Despite not quite being greenlit at this stage, **24**'s Evan Katz and Manny Coto are already on board to serve as showrunners, with Patrick McKay and J.D. Payne already working on a script for the pilot episode.

In one final piece of Marvel news this month, the much-heralded **Daredevil** (it is pretty awesome, isn't it?) has cast one of its key figures ahead of Season 2 hitting Netflix next year. After having already cast Jon Bernthal as The Punisher and with Bullseye confirmed to appear, the show has brought in **G.I. Joe: Retaliation**'s Élodie Yung as Elektra Natchios. Elektra, of course, is famed for being one of Matt Murdock's many 'one trues' and also for being one of the most deadly assassins in the Marvel Universe. She also just so happened to suffer a memorable death at the hands of Bullseye in the comic book world. Whether something similar happens in the Netflix-exclusive show, we'll have to wait and see. AP

GHOSTBUSTERS

Bill Murray has finally agreed to cameo in the Paul Feig-helmed reboot/rehash of the classic comedy. As with Dan Aykroyd, who has already let slip his brief appearance as a cab driver, Murray's part is very unlikely to be a reprise of Peter Venkman, the character who arguably made the original so much fun. While a fleeting glimpse of both might be fun for the audience, surely if they're not repeating their signature roles, it's all a bit lame. It's made even more so by the news that Ozzy Osbourne could also make an appearance in a scene filmed at a rock gig. On the plus side, we're looking forward to seeing what Melissa McCarthy, Kristen Wiig, Kate McKinnon and Leslie Jones will bring to the 'Busters when it opens on July 15th, 2016.



Although there's no UK release slated as yet, the latest from Mike Flanagan (**Oculus**, **Absentia**) is due in the US at the end of September, and has already produced this evocative poster. The film's premise – that of a child whose nightmares manifest into reality – certainly gives us reason to stay up awaiting its arrival.

A NIGHTMARE ON ELM STREET

If you thought countless varying-in-quality sequels, crossovers and remakes were bad enough, how about another remake of an already remade property? For those of you who are still struggling to vanquish your memory of 2010's **A Nightmare on Elm Street**, the bad news is it's being reported that yet another redo is on the way.

New Line, so often described as the house that Freddy built, are planning to remake one of their most beloved movies. What's strange here is that the current news on the project doesn't list Platinum Dunes, who oversaw the previous redo, as producing this upcoming effort. Based on their Jackie Earle Haley-starring last attempt, that could very well be a good thing.

Orphan's David Leslie Johnson, whose credits also include **The Walking Dead** and who is currently working on **The Conjuring: Enfield Poltergeist**, has already been brought on board to pen this new telling of Wes Craven's iconic 1984 film. Obviously one big elephant in the room that needs addressing is Freddy Krueger himself. With Robert Englund so synonymous with the character, it was far too difficult for the highly accomplished Haley to don the fedora and striped sweater in 2010's re-tread. Despite what many fans would want, it's near-enough certain that Englund's time as Freddy is completely done, and so the big question now is who to go with as the new new Freddy. AP

DC

As the mood of some starts to swing towards the more optimistic end of the scale when it comes to **Batman V Superman: Dawn of Justice**, some more details are coming out on certain mystery roles. First up, **The Wolverine**'s Tao Okamoto's unknown role has now been confirmed to be that of Mercy Graves. Mercy is a character created in 1996 for **Superman: The Animated Series**, where she was a personal assistant and bodyguard to Lex Luthor. As such, expect to see Okamoto at the side of Jesse Eisenberg's Lex when Zack Snyder's film arrives next year. Elsewhere, and more interestingly, it's believed that Jena Malone's unknown role, at one point speculated to be that of Carrie Kelley, is actually that of another red-headed Bat-aide: Barbara Gordon. That particular scoop remains unconfirmed at this stage, and if true then it's not known whether this is a Babs who *is* Batgirl, who *has been* Batgirl or is now simply Oracle. **Batman V Superman: Dawn of Justice** is set for a March 25th, 2016 release.

Opening things up to the jurisdiction of the Green Lanterns, the already confirmed 2020 **Green Lantern** movie has been renamed **Green Lantern Corps.**, suggesting that we will indeed be seeing far more than just one or two GLs. Tyrese Gibson has revealed that he's had talks with Warner Brothers for the role of John Stewart, although a certain Hal Jordan rumour has now been put to bed. Chris Pine had initially been reported as being in talks to play Wonder Woman's love interest, Steve Trevor, before that story was reported as a cunning rouse designed to disguise the fact that Pine was *actually* in talks to play Hal Jordan. Seemingly, the initial story was right all along, with Pine now cast as Trevor, obviously ruling him out of the Green Lantern gig. **Green Lantern Corps.** is set for a June 19th, 2020 release, although at least one Lantern is expected to appear in the two-part **Justice League**, currently set for November 2017 and June 2019 releases. As for Chris Pine, his Steve Trevor will be getting all cosy with Gal Gadot's Diana when **Wonder Woman** hits screens on June 23rd, 2017.

Taking things over to Gotham City, the big news is that Michael Cera has been cast as Robin... in the upcoming **LEGO Batman Movie**. The **Scott Pilgrim vs. The World** star will be voicing the Boy Wonder in Chris McKay's fun Dark Knight effort, which is set for a May 26th, 2017 release. And yes, Will Arnett is back to voice the Caped Crusader.

Now in arguably the coolest news of the month (well, at least to some of us here at Moonbase Alpha), one of the greatest ~~Batman~~ Joker stories of all time is to be adapted into an animated feature. Yes, of course we mean **The Killing Joke**. Warner Bros. Animation and DC Entertainment are developing the project, which will focus on the acclaimed work of Alan Moore and Brian Bolland. Telling one version of the Clown Prince of Crime's origin story, **The Killing Joke** sees The Joker at his maniacal worst, including torturing Jim Gordon and paralysing Barbara Gordon, leaving her confined to a wheelchair. The legendary Bruce Timm will be executive producing the animated adaptation of this classic tale. Additionally, the upcoming DC animated slate also features **Batman: Bad Blood**, which will be an original story that introduces Batwoman into the animated realm, and **Justice League vs. Titans**, which will see the Teen Titans feature in their first animated movie as they butt heads with the JL. All three of these animated efforts are set for next year.

Whilst there's been a few bits of news in terms of DC-based movies, there's been a whole host of additions in the various DC shows that are set to hit screens shortly. With that said, take a deep breath and do your best to keep up...

Firstly, **Arrow** has found its Season Four big bad as the MCU's Dum Dum Dugan, Neal McDonough, has been cast as Damien Darhk. The rogue himself was referenced and teased during the second half of the show's Season Three, and he's a genius-level criminal with major ties to the H.I.V.E. organisation. Not content with *that* threat for Stephen Amell's Oliver Queen, the Emerald Archer will also do battle with a take on DC's Baron Blitzkrieg. **Holby City**'s Jimmy Akingbola will be playing Baron Reiter, which falls in line with Blitzkrieg's alias in the comic book world. In the funny books, the Baron is a Nazi villain with super strength, heat vision and the ability to fly. How those powers are adapted to the small screen remain to be seen. It *is* believed, however, that Baron Reiter will torment Ollie during the show's flashback moments. One other rogue set to join the mix is Anarky, who will be played by **Bates Motel**'s Alexander Calvert. Working for Damien Darhk in the show, Anarky will be depicted as an unhinged criminal for hire rather than the twisted revolutionary often seen in the DC comic book world. Luckily for Oliver Queen, though, he has some back-up on the way in the shape of Mr. Terrific. Echo Kellum has been announced as playing Curtis Holt, who is seemingly a new take on the familiar comic book version of Mr. Terrific known as Michael Holt. Working closely with Emily Bett Rickards' Felicity Smoak, Terrific will be the show's first openly gay character and his powers will be that he's generally great at everything and also has his floating T-Spheres to combat the bad guys. Whilst Mr. Terrific is confirmed for **Arrow**'s Season Four, there's a proposition that will have comic book fans salivating at the thought. With **Constantine** now sadly cancelled, **Arrow** executive producer Wendy Mericle has revealed that there have been talks about having Matt Ryan's John Constantine turn up in **Arrow** at some point. Nothing's been agreed at this stage, although all involved are hopeful of having Hellblazer appear in Starling City. And finally, with all this talk of new rogues and

heroes, poor Oliver Queen has nearly been glossed over. After the events of Season Three in which he seemingly had to give up the Arrow moniker, star Stephen Amell has teased that Ollie will be taking on the new mantle of Green Arrow in Season Four. Adding further fuel to this fire, Amell appeared at San Diego Comic-Con in the Master Bowman's new outfit; an outfit that nicely resembles Green Arrow's comic book duds. **Arrow** returns to US screens on October 6th, with a UK return expected to follow shortly after.

From Starling City to Central City, and the Grant Gustin-starring **Flash** has also been inundated with new faces recently. What's likely more eye-catching to DC comic book fans is the addition of *two* other Flashes for the show's second season. First up, **Masters of Sex**'s Teddy Sears has been brought in as Jay Garrick. Garrick is the Golden Age Flash and somebody who was teased during the Season One finale when his helmet popped up (easy now). Jay will arrive in Central City as a mysterious stranger who is there to warn Barry Allen and S.T.A.R. Labs about an impending threat that they cannot take down alone. Sounds ominous. Additionally, **Divergent**'s Keiynan Lonsdale has been cast as Wally West. In comic book lore, Wally is the nephew of Iris West and initially becomes Kid Flash before eventually taking on the mantle of The Flash for himself. Whether Wally makes any moves towards a superhero alter-ego during Season Two is open to speculation. In other new additions, **The Final Destination**'s Shantel VanSanten is to play Patty Spivot, a comic book character who is a police officer with an interest in science. In **The Flash**, she'll be the new partner of Jesse L. Martin's Joe West and will also be a love interest for Barry Allen. As for Barry himself, much like Oliver Queen, he's set to get some new duds for his second year. Not quite as dramatic as Arrow's apparent transition to Green Arrow, Barry's new Flash outfit will just be a little more in line with the traditional comic book costume, i.e. a white background to the Flash logo, much like what viewers have already seen from the *future* Flash in the show. In terms of who Barry may be going up against, the aforementioned 'impending threat' that Jay Garrick is on about is likely to be Zoom. Another Reverse-Flash, Zoom is the fastest of near-enough all speedsters, with his speed coming from his ability to essentially stop and alter time. That role has yet to be cast, although some rumours claim that the show's version of Zoom could wind up tying into Rick Cosnett's apparently-deceased Eddie Thawne. What we *do* know, however, is that the first episode of **The Flash**'s Season Two will see Barry butting heads with DC's Atom-Smasher. Cast as Al Rothstein, aka Atom-Smasher, is the Rated-R Superstar, former WWE Champion Adam 'Edge' Copeland. Interestingly, the character has been described as one of the most powerful that The Flash will face this season, which is a little different to his comic book roots where Atom-Smasher is actually a hero. Also, Al Rothstein is a name who was confirmed earlier in Season One as being somebody who passed away during the particle accelerator accident that created The Flash. As such, many are predicting that this version of Atom-Smasher is one from an alternative timeline, which would fit in nicely with the Multiverse concept that is going to play a part in Season Two. Also squaring off with Barry Allen will be career criminal Lewis Snart, father of Wentworth Miller's Captain Cold and Peyton List's Golden Glider. Taking on the role of Lewis will be Michael Ironside, himself no stranger to DC shows having played General Sam Lane in **Smallville** and even voicing Batman in the brilliant **Legends of the Dark Knight** episode of **Batman: The Animated Series**. **The Flash** returns to US screens on October 6th, with the UK return again expected to follow shortly after.

In some other shared universe news, **DC's Legends of Tomorrow** continues to take shape with the addition of two major characters. Firstly, the 'big bad' of the show has finally been cast. We've known for a while that the ragtag bunch of 'legends' would be tangling with the immortal Vandal Savage, but it's now been confirmed that **Tarzan**'s Casper Crump has nabbed the Savage gig. Brought in to help the fight against Vandal is Hawkman, with this last month revealing that **Reckless**' Falk Hentschel will be playing Carter Hall, aka Hawkman, in the show. Given how Ciara Renee's Kendra Saunders, aka Hawkgirl, is already a confirmed fixture of the upcoming series, it makes perfect sense to bring her other half into the fold. Both Vandal Savage and Hawkman will make their CW/DC debuts in the next **Arrow**/**Flash** crossover event before finding a more permanent home in **DC's Legends of Tomorrow**, which is set to debut early next year.

In even *further* DC-based news (still with us?), **Gotham** has brought in **The Shield's** Michael Chiklis as GCPD Captain Nathaniel Barnes for its Season Two. Captain Barnes will start off as an idol of Ben McKenzie's Jim Gordon before the two eventually become enemies as the season progresses. And finally, CBS' **Supergirl** show has added **Sons of Anarchy**'s Chris Browning as the villainous nuclear-themed Reactron and Jenna Dewan Tatum as Lucy Lane, sister of a certain Lois. **Supergirl** has an October 26th US debut scheduled, with a UK home yet to be found. From what we've seen so far, though, the show looks surprisingly better than we'd expected. AP

horrorchannel

A round-up of what not to miss this month on Horror Channel...

AUGUST 27TH – DARK NIGHT OF THE SCARECROW (1981)
One of the best made-for-TV movies ever, Larry Drake (**Darkman**) plays Bubba Ritter, a gentle giant wrongly accused of hurting a young girl. Following his murder, his assailants begin to meet horrific ends. Charles Durning is at his most conniving and sleazy.

+++

AUGUST 29TH – F (2010)
Urban nightmares come real as a teacher (David Schofield), who's already at breaking point, comes under siege in the school when homicidal youths invade after hours.

+++

SEPTEMBER 2ND - MAGIC (1978)
There's nothing more terrifying than a sentient ventriloquist's dummy, really is there? Well, get the brown trousers on for this classic directed by Richard Attenborough, in which Anthony Hopkins has trouble with Fats, his wooden sidekick.

+++

SEPTEMBER 13TH – THE WICKER TREE (2011)
Director Robin Hardy's follow-up to his seminal '70s shocker isn't to everyone's taste (in fact, most hated it), but it's still a fun romp through the pagan world that's worth watching. Even if it is to see how badly shoe-horned into the story the titular tree is!

+++

Classic **Doctor Who** continues its successful run, with stories this month including Peter Davison in **Resurrection of the Daleks** and Colin Baker in **Attack of the Cybermen**, with Baker also appearing opposite the Second Doctor Patrick Troughton in **The Two Doctors**. There's also a return of everyone's favourite musclebound half-god as Kevin Sorbo undertakes **Hercules: The Legendary Journeys**.

Horror Channel is available on SKY 319, Virgin 149, Freeview 70, Freesat 138 and TalkTalk 487.

AND FINALLY...

After previously rumoured to have been offered to Christopher Nolan (see **TTC** #408), **Ready Player One** will now be helmed by Steven Spielberg. The adaptation of Ernest Cline's bestselling YA novel is going to be a joint venture between Village Roadshow, DreamWorks and Warners and will be scripted by Zak Penn. Expect it to hit cinemas on December 15th, 2017.

+++

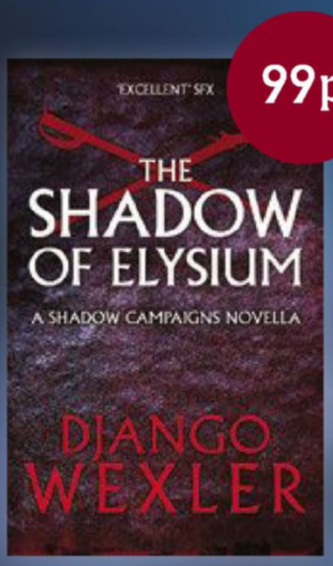
After last month's news of J. K. Simmons and Michael Keaton jumping ship on **Kong: Skull Island**, it appears Samuel L. Jackson, John C. Reilly and Tom Wilkinson may well be taking the journey to the land of the giant ape. With the release date still set for March 10th, 2017, they better stop monkeying around.

+++

Game of Thrones have expanded their cast even further (well they have to since they keep killing them off) with the addition of Max Von Sydow, who will play Bran Stark's mystical mentor the Three Eyed Raven, and Lovejoy himself Ian McShane, who will take a small, currently unknown, but key role when the show returns for its sixth season in the first half of next year. Meanwhile, HBO Programming President, Michael Lombardo, implied that there will be at least another two seasons in Westeros following this upcoming one.

TTC 416 stories by Martin Unsworth, Andrew Pollard. Edited by Martin Unsworth

DJANGO WEXLER'S
THE SHADOW CAMPAIGNS



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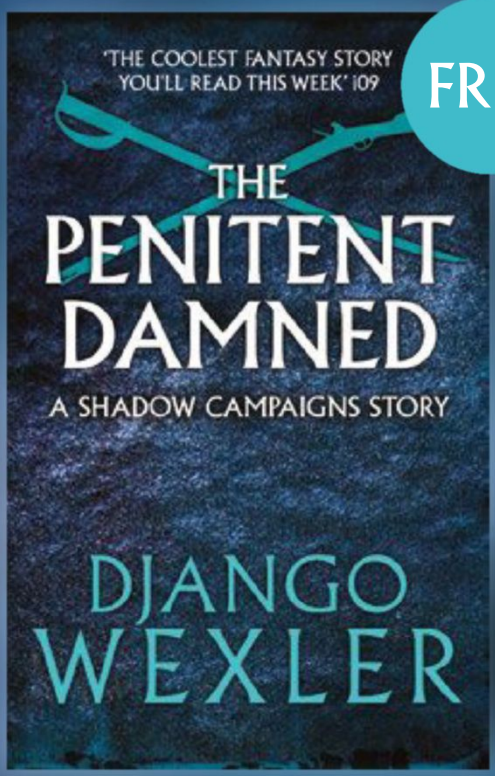

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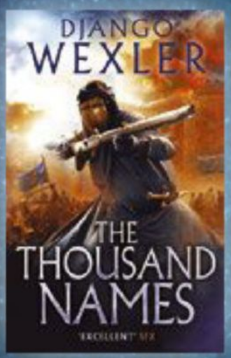

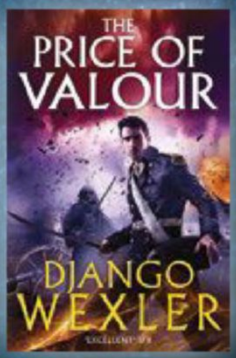

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Look WHO'S Back

By Kieron Moore

The Doctor and Clara are back, alongside old enemies and new faces. STARBURST takes a trip forward to this autumn and reports back on DOCTOR WHO Series Nine...

Kids these days have it lucky – back in the '90s, fans had to wait sixteen years for a new series of *Doctor Who*. But it's true that waiting a whole nine months for the new series of such a beloved show can seem like a grueling effort of Time War proportions, and so we're here to bridge the gap by bringing you up to speed on what to look forward to in Series Nine.

Having won over fans and critics with his grouchier approach to time travel, Peter Capaldi's Twelfth Doctor is back for another round of adventures, as is Jenna Coleman's Clara Oswald – in her third series aboard the TARDIS, making her one of the longest-serving companions. This time around, Clara will be throwing herself full throttle into life with the Doctor; no more Danny Pink, no more juggling priorities, just pure and simple time travel.

Like last year, the series will be comprised of twelve episodes, though it'll have a somewhat different format – two-part stories, forgotten for the latter half of the Matt Smith era, are back with a vengeance. With one exception, these twelve episodes are divided into pairings, though some pairs will be more loosely connected than others; showrunner Steven Moffat, returning for his fifth series, has stated that each two-parter will have "*a substantial difference between the two halves*" so that "*you won't be absolutely certain whether a show is going to be a two-parter or not*". But our guide might help you work it out...

EPISODE 1: THE MAGICIAN'S APPRENTICE
EPISODE 2: THE WITCH'S FAMILIAR

Writer: Steven Moffat
Director: Hettie MacDonald
Guest Starring: Michelle Gomez as Missy, Jemma Redgrave as Kate Stewart, Kelly Hunter, Clare Higgins, Jaye Griffiths

THE LOW DOWN:

The Doctor's not the only returning Time Lord this series! After being brilliantly evil in last year's finale, Michelle Gomez returns as his arch-nemesis Missy (can we call her the Master again, yet?). On her return, Gomez stated, "*Things have been a little beige since I left Missy behind, so I'm delighted to be putting my lippie back on. I'm positively dying to see the Doctor again!*" UNIT are also back, with Jemma Redgrave's Kate Stewart now a frequently-seen face, and Jaye Griffiths as a new member of the team, presumably filling the gap left by the dearly-departed Osgood (but is she really dead? More on that later...)

Scenes from this two-parter, written by showrunner Moffat, were filmed on location in Spain. Plus, with Clare Higgins, who played Ohila in 2013's *The Night of the Doctor* on the cast list, it seems another visit to Karn, first seen in 1976's Tom Baker story *The Brain of Morbius*, is on the cards. But wait – there's more! It's very likely that the Dalek city seen in the trailer (as released at Comic-Con, but you've all seen it online by now) is in this highly-packed story. Could it be Skaro? We can't say for sure, but what we do know is that the story sees the Doctor make a 'cataclysmic mistake' – and when you're surrounded by your worst enemies, that's not a good thing to do.

EPISODES 3 AND 4

Writer: Toby Whithouse
Director: Daniel O'Hara
Guest Starring: Paul Kaye as Prentis, Neil Fingleton as The Fisher King, Morven Christie as O'Donnell, Arsher Ali as Mason Bennett

THE LOW DOWN:

Make sure to have the back of your sofa ready (do people really do that?) as things will get spooky in this second pair of episodes, written by Toby Whithouse – the *Being Human* creator whose previous *Who* credits include *School Reunion*, *The Vampires of Venice* and *The God Complex*. These episodes, described by Moffat as "*brilliantly creepy*", see the Doctor and Clara visit a haunted underwater base and come face to face with the Fisher King – played by 7ft 7in former basketball player Neil Fingleton, who's recently been seen as a giant in *Game of Thrones*. He's just

one of several spooky fellas to be seen in this story… look out in the trailer for the ghostly, panda-eyed Abraham Lincoln lookalike and his cronies who'll will be keeping you awake at night long after these episodes finish.

EPISODE 5: THE GIRL WHO DIED
EPISODE 6: THE WOMAN WHO LIVED

Writer: Jamie Mathieson and Steven Moffat (Ep. 5), Catherine Tregenna (Ep. 6)
Director: Ed Bazalgette
Guest Starring: Maisie Williams, David Schofield as Odin, Rufus Hound as Sam Swift

THE LOWDOWN:

A loosely-connected pair of episodes, here, with episode five set in Viking times and episode six set somewhat later in British history and featuring highwaymen – as well as a highwaywoman.

That woman is Maisie Williams, whose mysterious character links both these episodes. After the *Game of Thrones* star's appearance in the Comic-Con trailer hinted that the Doctor already knew this girl/woman who dies/lives, the internet went typically crazy with speculation over her identity: is she Susan Foreman? Jenny, the Doctor's Daughter? The Rani? River Song? The Face of Boe? Moffat has since confirmed, however, that she's not playing a returning character, though she will give the Doctor "*exactly the right sort of hell*". Whoever she is, it sounds like kick-ass as Arya Stark – albeit toned down for a family audience. If you've seen the *Thrones* Season Five finale, you'll know what we mean.

These episodes are shaping up to be very interesting, with two exciting historical periods and new monsters in the form of Big Daddy-esque robot mercenaries the Mire. It's also great to see Jamie Mathieson, who wrote two of last year's best-loved episodes, returning to the show, and to see Catherine Tregenna, formerly of *Torchwood*, getting a chance to write for the Doctor.

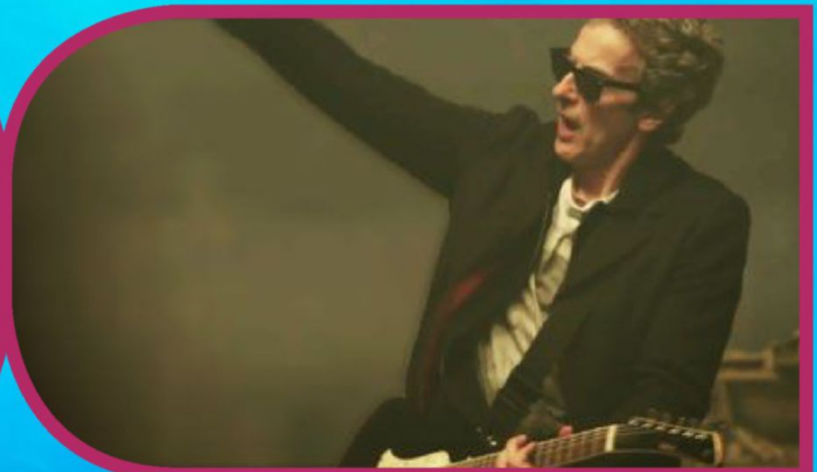
EPISODES 7 AND 8

Writer: Peter Harness
Director: Daniel Nettheim
Guest Starring: Ingrid Oliver as Osgood, Jemma Redgrave as Kate Stewart, Rebecca Front, Jaye Griffiths

THE LOWDOWN:

The Zygons are back! The gurgling orange shape-shifters, who originally faced Tom Baker's Doctor in 1975 and were last seen causing trouble in 2013's fiftieth anniversary special, will be behind a global uprising in this two-parter from Peter Harness, writer of last year's *Kill the Moon* and underappreciated BBC fantasy drama *Jonathan Strange and Mr Norrell*. It's set to be an action-packed epic, with the Doctor having been spotted sporting a Union Jack parachute (perhaps it's called *The Zygon Who Loved Me*…).

Luckily, backup is on hand; as well as an appearance from Rebecca Front (the second of Capaldi's *The Thick Of It* co-stars to join his Doctor after Chris Addison popped up last year), these episodes will see Series Nine's second appearance from UNIT's Jemma Redgrave and Jaye Griffiths. More intriguingly, though, Ingrid Oliver will return as Osgood, despite having been cruelly murdered by Missy in last year's finale. The enthusiastic scientist, an admirer of the Doctor who takes fashion tips from his various incarnations, had become quite a fan favourite and so it's no big surprise she's been brought back – though it was surprising for Oliver herself, who described getting the call from the BBC as "*unexpected and brilliant*". But we definitely saw her get vaporised, so how can she be back? Perhaps it's something to do with the Zygon duplicate of her still running around at the end of *The Day of the Doctor*… if so, the Time Lord should be careful about placing too much trust in his number one fan.



EPISODE 9

Writer: Mark Gatiss
Director: Justin Molotnikov
Guest Starring: Reece Shearsmith, Bethany Black, Elaine Tan

THE LOWDOWN:

***Who* regular Mark Gatiss returns to pen his eighth episode for the series, and he's bringing an old friend along – Reece Shearsmith, best known for writing and starring in *The League of Gentlemen* alongside Gatiss and Steve Pemberton. An official image has been released of Shearsmith, who also had a cameo as Patrick Troughton in Gatiss' *An Adventure in Space and Time*, in a formal futuristic costume – kind of *Babylon 5* meets dressing gown – giving a hint as to the episode's setting. It's a scary episode that had been "*brewing in the dark recesses of [Gatiss'] mind*", so should be one to look out for, especially if he can match the quality of recent hit *The Crimson Horror*.**

EPISODE 10

Writer: Sarah Dollard
Director: Justin Molotnikov
Guest Starring: Joivan Wade as Rigsy, Naomi Ackie as Jen, Caroline Boulton as Habbrian

THE LOWDOWN:

Another contemporary Earth story, this episode sees the return of Rigsy, the enterprising graffiti artist who befriended Clara in last year's *Flatline*. Joivan Wade has been seen reprising this role alongside the time travelling duo in a busy Cardiff shopping street, as part of a plot believed to center around 'glitches in reality'.

Episode ten sees another new writer join the roster – Sarah Dollard, who like Whithouse and Mathieson, has previously worked on supernatural drama *Being Human*. It's notable that, after recent criticisms leveled at Moffat's all-male writing team, Series Nine now has two female writers – which may not seem like a lot, but is twice as many as the entirety of Series One to Eight. That's progress, right?

EPISODES 11 AND 12

Writer: Steven Moffat
Director: Rachel Talalay
Guest Starring: ???

THE LOWDOWN:

Like last year, the two-part finale is written by showrunner Moffat and directed by Rachel Talalay of *Freddy's Dead: The Final Nightmare* and *Tank Girl* fame. But Talalay has described this story, which has started filming at Cardiff Castle, as "*completely different*" to *Dark Water/Death in Heaven*, and Moffat has said that with episode eleven's script, he's set himself "*a ludicrous challenge*" – so who knows what to expect?

FUTURE ADVENTURES

Episode twelve is set to air on Saturday 5th December, which means there won't be too long to wait after Series Nine ends for the now-traditional Christmas special – Capaldi's second, and the new series' eleventh. And what then? A tenth series has already been confirmed, with Moffat staying on as showrunner. It's not known, however, whether Jenna Coleman will stay on after the end of this year, though it's almost certain that Peter Capaldi, a long-term Whovian who loves every minute of his job, will be sticking around. And looking even further into the future, it's been reported that the BBC have a 'five-year plan' as to where the series is going up until 2020. *Doctor Who* may take us all across space and time, but as a staple of Saturday night television, it's certainly not going away any time soon.

DOCTOR WHO Series Nine begins on BBC One on Saturday September 19th.

MASTER PLANS

The Doctor's friend-turned-nemesis returns in Series Nine - here are some of the Master's most memorable (for better or worse) evil schemes...

TERROR OF THE AUTONS (1971)
In league with the Nestene Consciousness, the Master distributes plastic daffodils across the world, only for them to strangle anyone who dares to sniff them. The first appearance of the rogue Time Lord, Roger Delgado made a whole new generation suspicious of goatees.

THE DEADLY ASSASSIN (1976)
At the end of his regeneration cycle, a rotting Master has a plan to extend his life – a plan that will also result in the destruction of Gallifrey. Though a result of Delgado's unfortunate death, this iconic story's new take on the Master would redefine his character.

CASTROVALVA (1982)
To kill the Doctor once and for all, the Master (now played by Anthony Ainley) creates a whole city out of pure mathematics, the weird space-bending nature of which will destroy the newly-regenerated Doctor's mind. He'd obviously attended the Ernst Stavro Blofeld School of Elaborate and Fallible Death Traps.

THE KING'S DEMONS (1983)
In disguise as Sir Gilles Estram (Get it? Clever, eh? Eh?), the Master plans to discredit King John in order to prevent the signing of the Magna Carta, and then... no, that's it. Why? Well, why not?

THE SOUND OF DRUMS / THE LAST OF THE TIME LORDS (2007)
Having survived the Time War, John Simm's more-manic-than-ever Master brought the last humans from the end of the universe back to 2007, got himself elected Prime Minister with the support of McFly and Anne Widdecombe, and aged the Doctor into Gollum.

DARK WATER / DEATH IN HEAVEN (2014)
Teaming up with an alien race to take over the world? Michelle Gomez's Missy appeared with a very classic masterplan, albeit with the greater motivation of handing the Cyber-army over to the Doctor – because if he becomes evil too, maybe they can be friends again.

STARBURST'S TV reviewer – a lifelong fan of DOCTOR WHO – has a personal look to the future of the long-running science fiction smash and wonders if it's time for a change...

We're almost at a brand new series of *Doctor Who* – the ninth since the show was dragged out of the wilderness in 2005 – and that's always a cause for celebration. *Doctor Who* remains not only a reliable British ratings banker (the last series secured an average weekly audience across various viewing platforms of around 7.4 million in the UK – slightly, but not insignificantly, down on previous years) but the BBC's top-selling title, licensed to an extraordinary 189 territories in 2014. Last autumn's whistle-stop 'world tour' sent new Doctor Peter Capaldi, actress Jenna Coleman (companion Clara) and showrunner Steven Moffat across five continents in twelve days to promote the new series; the trio being received with a fervour usually only reserved for international rock stars. In theory, *Doctor Who* is on top of the world, fighting fit and firing on all cylinders...

But if we look a little closer, it seems that perhaps all isn't quite as it should be in the world's longest-running and most enduring science fiction series. Appreciation of *Doctor Who* and the merits of its showrunners (a term which didn't exist in *Doctor Who* terms until 2005, so strictly speaking we've only got two to compare and contrast) is, as this very magazine has pointed out in the past, the very definition of subjective. One fan's meat is another fan's poison. But looking back over the last five haphazard, messy, scattergun years of *Doctor Who* - erratic scheduling, endlessly-tweaked titles and theme music arrangements, reckless and unpopular redesigns of series icons (multi-coloured Fruit Pastille Daleks, anyone?) - and digging below the superficial surface of flashy visual effects, larger-than-life performances and smug, self-satisfied scripts, it's beginning to look, from certain angles, as if the show has become one massive example of Emperor's New Clothes. *Doctor Who* has become random, ramshackle, and directionless and it seems as if there's a hardcore of fans who have either been blindly taken in by Moffat's 'Smoke and Mirrors' approach to storytelling or, perhaps more significantly, are afraid to voice any hint of criticism of the show's current regime for fear of plunging it back into the chaos and confusion of its last few pitiful series in the 1980s, terrified that the BBC will take the show off the air unless they continue to fete the wild imagination and genius of its showrunner. Quite simply: for many fans, *any* Doctor Who is better than *no* Doctor Who. As things stand at the moment, I'm not so sure...

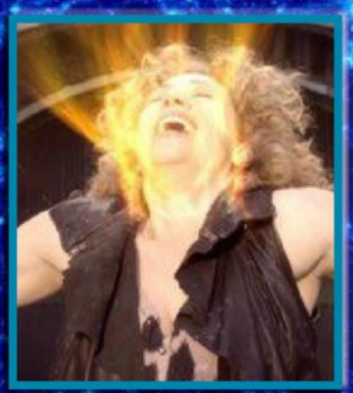
Steven Moffat, discussing his work on the series in an interview in 2013, explained that his job involved "*just making up nonsensical adventures*". Not only does he do the show itself a massive disservice - it's never been 'nonsense' before - he also fundamentally invites the audience to ask itself quite why they spend so much time following a series that its own showrunner appears to find embarrassing and infantile.

But let's look a little closer. My handy Concise Oxford describes 'nonsense' as 'absurd or meaningless words or ideas' and a quick Google finds 'nonsensical' defined as 'having little or no meaning; making little sense'. Suddenly, it seems as if Moffat may be possessed of a bit more self-awareness than he's previously been given credit for. His supporters are quick to roll out their lists of 'classic' episodes from Moffat's canon (although, in truth, many of them are just middling efforts only really worthy of note because they're marginally better than some of the howlers which surround them) whilst glossing over some of the episodes he's written which can really only be ennobled by being described as 'nonsense'. Moffat-written episodes such as 'Let's Kill Hitler', 'The Doctor, The Widow and the Wardrobe' and 'The Time of the Doctor' are surely amongst the very worst *Doctor Who* episodes ever made. Others, commissioned under his watch, are little better; who would willingly endure the likes of 'Dinosaurs on a Spaceship', 'Rings of Akhaten', 'Nightmare in Silver' or last year's shockingly ill-judged Frank Cottrell Boyce-written episode 'In the Forest of the Night' a second time? Incidentally, rumours that the BBC have hung a 'Gone Away' sign at the doors of the Roath Lock Studios in Cardiff where *Doctor Who* is filmed, in case Cottrell Boyce comes knocking asking to write another script, remain unconfirmed...

Steven Moffat is a lifelong fan of *Doctor Who*; we've surely all seen that cute picture of the curly-haired, serious-faced ten year-old engrossed in a Target paperback book. Yet it rarely appears, from his work on the show, that he really *understands* it. Of course he gets the fundamental *nature* of it – adventures in Space

THE MOFFAT FACTOR

BY PAUL MOUNT



and Time - but he doesn't seem to be able to capture the essence and spirit of the show in his scripts. He's fascinated by the show's history and continuity, evidenced by the fact that he can't stop worrying at them like a dog with an exhausted bone. It may well be the case that he genuinely sees fifty-odd years of *Who* continuity as rich material for contemporary adventures or it may equally be that he can't resist rewriting the show's history and furthering its mythology for entirely egotistical reasons. Under Moffat's watch, we've seen the Doctor leaving Gallifrey for the first time, the Time War disappointingly realised as a simple space battle, the dilemma of life after the Doctor's twelfth regeneration solved by the Time Lords waving some magic pixie dust in his face and a general determination to explore mundane facets of the Doctor's early life – we've seen his cot! – which undermines his status as a mysterious, iconic adventurer and turns him into another slightly dull hero whose whole life is an open book with no chapter left unwritten.

Of course, Moffat was bound to want to take the show in a new direction after his predecessor Russell T Davies so brilliantly repositioned it as an inventive, inclusive, dynamic adventure series – to have merely aped the style and format of Davies would have been suicidal both for the show and, potentially, for Moffat's career, because no-one does Russell T Davies like Russell T Davies. But in trying to find a new style for the series, Moffat chose to wander along the blind alley of utterly misinterpreting and misrepresenting the character of the Doctor – firstly as 'madman in a box', a quirky and quixotic character torn from some flimsy, half-realised fairytale and, more recently, an agreeably testier older gentleman with scarcely a good word to spare for anyone. Moffat has gone on record as describing the whole show as a 'fairytale' and many of his own stories feature a preponderance of bewildered (usually irritating) children and stories which feature not four-square alien monsters and supervillains, but rather creatures with some perception gimmick built into their DNA, from the Weeping Angels (they only move when you blink), The Silence (turn away from them and forget them) and the Dream Crabs (only exist when you think about them). Moffat seems to be trying to give the show the nightmare quality of a modern fairytale, but the results are often grim rather than Grimm. No-one's suggesting that *Doctor Who* should conform to one house-style and shouldn't experiment with its format from time to time but, as Davies once said so memorably, *Doctor Who* is 'steeped in death' and Moffat's lovely, sweet fairytale adventures have a tendency to be soaked in saccharine; utterly lacking in the rich, muscular and, above all, largely linear storytelling of the Davies era.

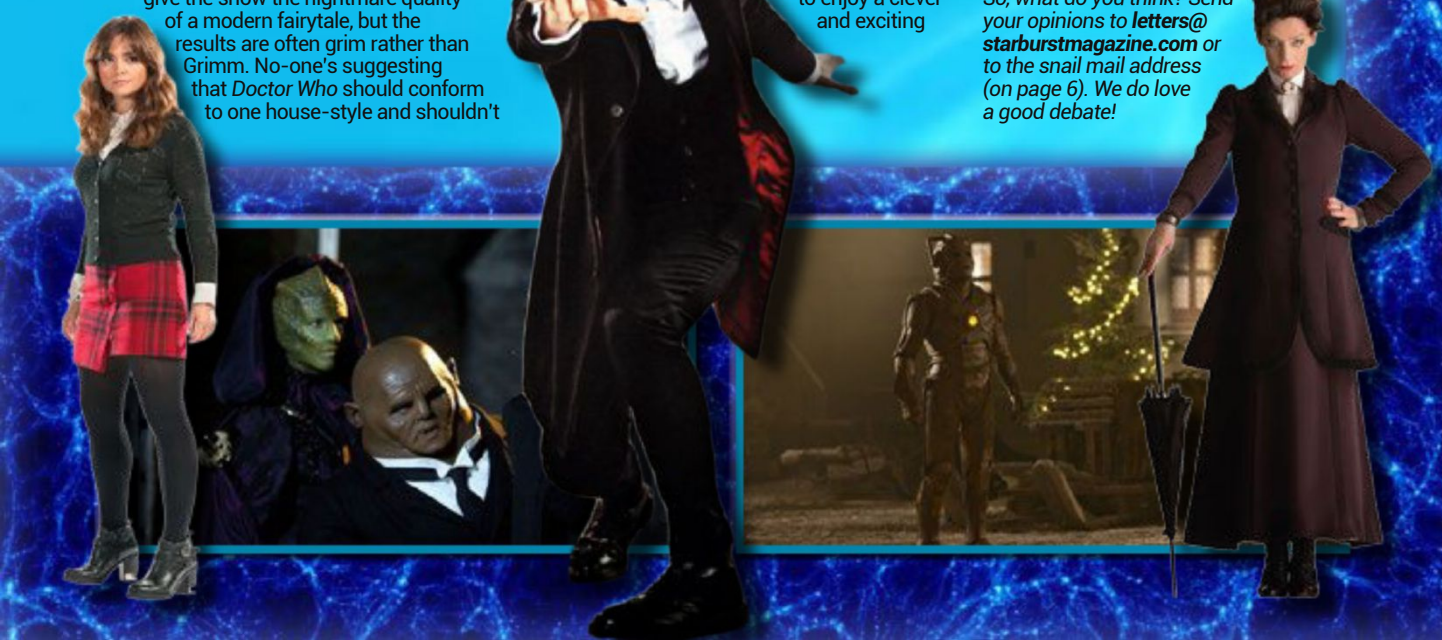
Casual viewers, fans, and TV critics alike have all bemoaned the lack of clarity in many of Moffat's ongoing stories. It's usually described as being 'over-complicated' but in truth, it goes further; Moffat's story arcs very rarely make any sense and they collapse under the weight of their own illogicality because he clearly has only the vaguest idea of where he's going with his rolling storylines, whilst his individual stories are often characterised by the once-amusing-now-loathsome expression 'timey-wimey', involving some cute time travel quirk which he hopes will make his narratives seem cleverer and more convoluted than they actually are. But he's very much a man of two or three ideas; inevitably, there's some piece of well-meaning alien technology gone rogue, action scenes which involve characters hanging in mid-air and his go-to default obsession with things in wardrobes and under beds which (he thinks) terrify children.

The nice clean lines of the Russell T Davies years have been replaced by muddy, dull storylines usually driven by just one central idea (where Davies' best episodes were packed and fizzing with ideas), watery and unconvincing story arcs and unsympathetic and often generally unlikeable core characters (let's face it, Amy Pond had none of the warmth and believability of Rose Tyler or Donna Noble). We've also had to endure inconsistent narratives, creative compromises, bad decisions (several 'classic' *Doctor Who* adversaries have been twisted out of recognition for mainly comedic purposes and rendered impotent as dramatic characters in the future - who could take the Sontarans or the Silurians seriously again after the indignities heaped upon them by the bafflingly inept Paternoster Gang?) and a fixation with mythology and continuity that threatens to try the patience and interest of a large part of the audience who tune in because they want to enjoy a clever and exciting adventure in Space and Time on a Saturday night.

But all is not lost. The arrival of Peter Capaldi in Series Eight managed to restore some semblance of respectability to the Doctor after the whirling-dervish/overexcited puppy characterisation foisted on poor Matt Smith, but the actor had to fight against some weak scripts whilst (in an unexpectedly brave move by Moffat) trying to establish the Doctor as 'a good man' - despite being portrayed as sharp-tongued, irascible, impatient and generally far removed from the boyish charm and pure charisma of David Tennant who took the show to heights of popularity it's unlikely to ever match again. The new series seems to offer a mellower Doctor and a warmer relationship between the Doctor and Clara but the worry remains that viewers chased away last year – and they *were* chased away, don't be told otherwise – might not be lured back by a series with no significant change in the show's *dramatis personae* to pique their curiosity...

Moffat has already been confirmed as still being in the showrunner chair for the next series. It's a chilling and uncomfortable thought for those of us who see these last five years as anything but a 'golden age' for *Doctor Who*. Moffat supporters may disagree, but the series is clearly in dire need of some new blood and a fresh hand at the tiller; a more inventive and supple imagination capable of doing more than just ploughing the same now bone-dry furrow. *Doctor Who* has suffered creative stagnation in the past and endured; we must remain resolute and optimistic and hope that the Doctor and his TARDIS - and their audience - are resilient enough to weather this current lull in its fortunes and that a brighter, fresher future is just around the corner.

So, what do you think? Send your opinions to ***letters@starburstmagazine.com*** *or to the snail mail address (on page 6). We do love a good debate!*



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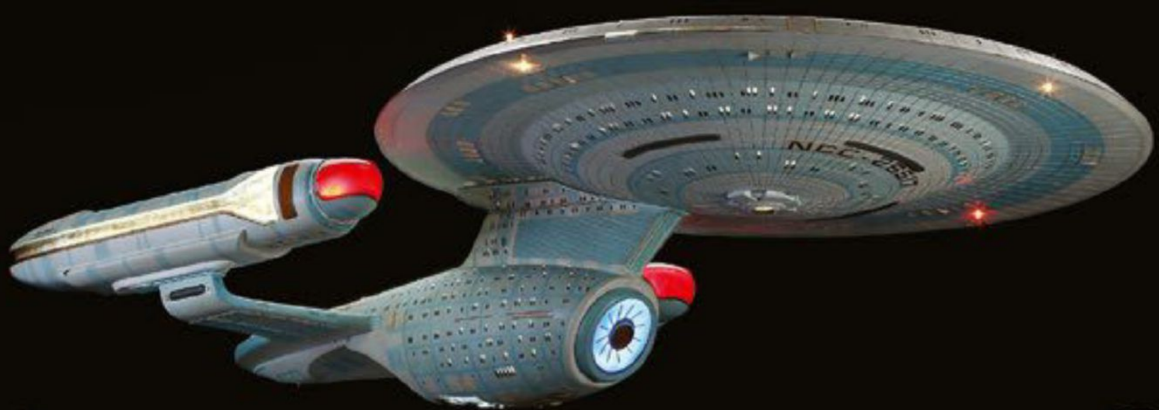

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THE STILL MISSING EPISODES

BY J.R. SOUTHALL

It's nearly two years now since the BBC announced the recovery and return of *The Enemy of the World* and (most of) *The Web of Fear*, amid a tornado of rumours claiming that the 'Indiana Jones of episode hunting' had tracked down and located almost all of the 106 episodes of *Doctor Who* that were then still missing from the BBC's archives. The big question that everyone's been asking since is, "Where are the other 97?" The truth is that most of them are probably in vintage TV heaven, having been junked back in the 1970s when the BBC sent out their destruction orders.

So how did we come to believe that one man might be able to achieve what nobody else had been able to, and bring the number of lost episodes down from a three-figure number into almost single figures? What has Phil Morris, the man in question, been doing for the last two years – and why aren't we hearing about it?

The latter two questions are easy to answer; Morris is doing what he has been doing for the past decade, overturning as many stones as he can in his quest to make sure the BBC's archives are as full as possible. It's a single-minded venture, and necessarily so – after all, it isn't like *The Enemy of the World* wasn't sitting there in Nigeria waiting for somebody to find it, and yet in forty years nobody else had summoned up the wherewithal to go and look – and Morris is a single-minded man. The kind of person who, once he's set himself a task, will focus on that task to the exclusion of most other things – including his personal wellbeing (he's just recovering from a rather debilitating illness and yet he's already overseas taking up the search once more). But he isn't doing this entirely out of charity for vintage TV enthusiasts; the last decade's undertakings will have cost Morris a small fortune, and he'd be mad not to expect at least some of that reimbursed.

Morris is also the kind of man who wouldn't want to do things prematurely, nor would he risk endangering his chances of increasing the number of his recoveries by advertising his achievements any more widely than necessary. He might have told us that "the wind is blowing in the right direction" following the October 2013 announcement, but if he's confident of finding more lost television series (and we're talking far more than simply episodes of *Doctor Who*) and thinks that by making further announcements he might jeopardise their recovery, he'll wait until the time would appear to be right.

The lack of any supplementary announcements isn't entirely down to Morris, though. He might have been the man of the hour two years ago, but the content of those eleven film cans was under the ownership of the BBC, and it is within their province to decide when and where – and even if – to make any subsequent announcements. After half a decade of Licence Fee freezes, falling DVD sales and shifting internal politics, the BBC can't afford to be as philanthropic as they might once have been. There's also the question of who is in charge of Phil's project; BBC Cardiff are responsible for *Doctor Who* as a brand, but, perhaps pertinently, BBC Worldwide control the programme's now-concluded classic series DVD range. Apparently, it was the Production Office who supervised the handling of Morris back in 2012, but now it seems that responsibility has been relinquished to Worldwide. It would be hardly a surprise, then, if delays were to be incurred.

That's if 'delay' is the right word, of course. Neither the BBC nor Phil Morris – nor indeed Paul Vanezis, the missing episodes expert who was largely responsible for getting Morris' search underway back in the late 2000s – have ever suggested when the most appropriate time for a further announcement, or for the termination of the project and the publication of its findings (whether those be additional films or merely the information that Morris has also been gathering) might be, or how far in the future.

So how did Morris' war cry of "Expect the unexpected" so quickly become an expectation that he'd managed the impossible, when nobody in any authority has ever given anything but the most

"When I have completed my mission all details will be revealed, and the story will be told in words and pictures and video so everyone can see for themselves. The story isn't quite finished yet, but it's genuine, well organised and under the aegis of the copyright holders."

Phil Morris, February 3rd 2009, Missing Episodes Forum

meagre and ambiguous of clues as to his achievements – and how has that euphoria so quickly evaporated?

The truth is that at some point before the eleven recovered episodes were returned from Nigeria, a leak within the BBC (and almost certainly not from one of the 'professional fans' who have been implicated within wider fandom) began a sequence of events that led to impossible expectations even before the corporation took possession of *The Web of Fear*. Morris' search had begun visibly, with a series of posts on the Missing Episodes Forum and a couple of appearances on a radio show and a DVD commentary track, and in an example of the left hand misinforming the right, his apparent report that there was a possibility of discovering the whereabouts of up to 90 missing episodes was erroneously taken as confirmation that he had found as many, after news began to break amongst those in the know that he had indeed managed to recover previously lost *Doctor Who*. An ensuing combination of confirmation bias and the echo chamber effect soon put meat on the rumours' bones.

The consequence of this was to make Morris' job more difficult. It seems that in spite of returning those episodes (two of which the BBC already possessed) in time to make them available for *Doctor Who*'s fiftieth anniversary, Morris had initially wanted his name kept off the news of the recovery in order that he might continue his search in relative anonymity – with a cover story concocted prior to the truth being revealed later on. Unfortunately, the emerging rumour storm erupted early in 2013, with Morris inextricably linked to the find, and the game was up. Since then, Morris has maintained a relatively low profile (his public appearances and social media activities feel more prolific than they actually are, thanks to the focus we place upon them), his concentration remaining devoted to his work. But the forums were soon buzzing with news of his achievement – and with all the speculation, hearsay and conjecture that went hand in hand with it.

To find is not always to possess, though, and while *Marco Polo* was initially as heavily rumoured as *The Enemy of the World* and *The Web of Fear*, two years later – and despite numerous instances of fans prematurely pre-announcing its imminent release – the William Hartnell story has yet to appear. It's not unlikely that *Marco Polo* was mentioned during discussions regarding the return of the other episodes, but it's equally as possible that negotiations to return it first into Morris' hands were hampered by the events of 2013. Let us hope that if Morris was indeed on its trail, that inquiry is still open or perhaps even concluded.

Thanks to nearly two years of apparent inactivity (doubtless any current developments are being very carefully screened), and after some admittedly unusual and possibly even questionable social media activity on Morris' behalf, fandom is increasingly becoming disillusioned with the idea that any more *Doctor Who* might have been recovered – and this is probably for the best. There's no doubt the waiting is set to continue, and the hysteria that followed October 2013 wasn't benefitting anyone.

On the other hand, it seems unlikely that ten years of searching would have turned up only the two stories in the same location, so it's still entirely possible that when the story of Morris' search for missing television is told – as both Morris and Vanezis have assured us, both before *and* after that initial announcement, that it will be – it will come with further recoveries attached. But nobody knows what else Morris might have found, nor whether it really will include more *Doctor Who*, so for now we must simply be patient and allow him to continue his work, safe in the knowledge that he's doing it for the benefit of us all.

"As myself and Philip have said in the past, the whole story will be told when the job is done and the job is not yet done."
Paul Vanezis, December 22nd 2013, Missing Episodes Forum

OUTSIDE THE BOX

ALL THE NEWS FROM THE WORLDS OF DOCTOR WHO WITH PAUL MOUNT

Series Ten for DOCTOR WHO!

It's been an open secret for some months – showrunner Steven Moffat appeared to confirm his continued involvement at a publicity event in New York recently (see #415) – but the BBC have now, without fanfare, confirmed that **Doctor Who** will return for a tenth (new) series. Page 32 of the BBC Worldwide Annual Review, published on July 14th, reports on matters concerning Corporate governance and states "*During the year matters under review included plans to launch the global genre brands BBC First in Australia and New Zealand on Foxtel and BBC Brit and BBC Earth in Poland; and investments in* ***The Musketeers*** *S3 and* ***Doctor Who*** *S10*". The upcoming Series Nine, however, commences on BBC One and BBC America on September 19th with Steven Moffat's *The Magician's Apprentice*, which will receive its worldwide premiere on August 27th at a special screening at Edinburgh's Filmhouse Cinema as part of The Guardian's Edinburgh International Television Festival. The screening, which will be followed by an onstage Q&A session, is already sold out.

DOCTOR WHO Festival Update

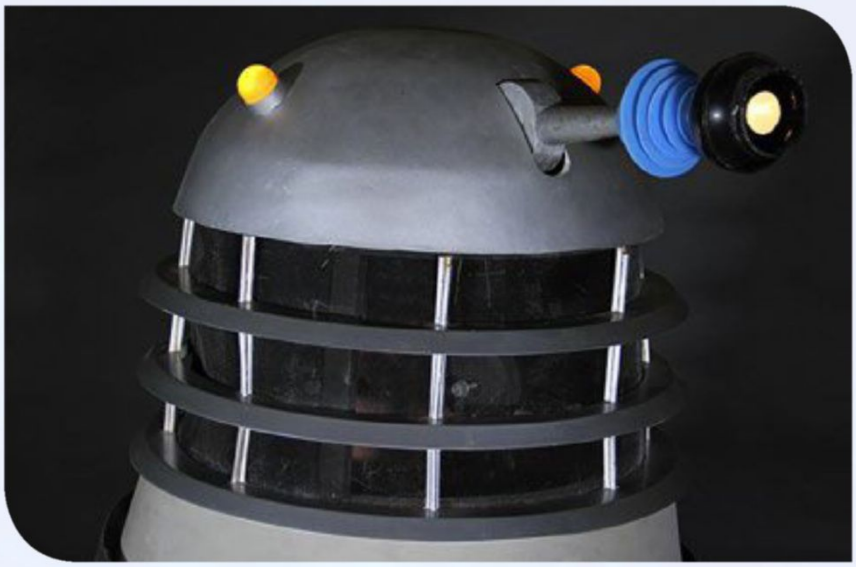
More guests have been announced for the **Doctor Who** Festival at the ExCel in London's Docklands between November 13th and 15th. Joining current Doctor Peter Capaldi and showrunner Steven Moffat at the event will be Michelle Gomez, the latest incarnation of the Doctor's deadly enemy The Master (now known as Missy) and Ingrid Oliver, who plays UNIT's Doctor-obsessed scientist Osgood, killed off in *Death in Heaven*, but resurrected in some form or another in episodes seven and eight of the upcoming series. The Festival will offer attendees an exclusive and interactive glimpse into how the world of **Doctor Who** is created and there will be photo opportunities with Capaldi, Oliver and Gomez plus the opportunity to have a photo taken on a set from Series Nine. As we reported last month, a similar event will take place in Sydney on the weekend of November 21st/22nd and whilst the guest list is still being finalised, it has been revealed that regular new series writer and long-time fan Mark Gatiss will be in attendance at the antipodean event. Members of the BAFTA award winning Real FX team, led by Danny Hargreaves, who provide the bangs and flashes of the show's visuals, will also be appearing at Sydney to demonstrate the art of creating **Doctor Who**'s explosive special effects. Tickets and further information will be available from **doctorwhofestival.com**

Peter Capaldi in Conversation

Current Doctor Peter Capaldi will be appearing in a one-off event at the Civic Theatre in Auckland on Tuesday November 24th in an event hosted by Adam Spencer. Capaldi will be discussing playing the role of the Doctor with the aid of selected episode clips and behind-the-scenes anecdotes. The actor will field questions from the audience and give them an insight into what life is like inside the TARDIS. As well as discussing the unique perspective he brings to playing the Doctor, Capaldi will also share some of the adventures he's had both in his role as the Doctor and throughout his career.

Book News

The BBC have issued further information about the three new Glamour Chronicles titles that form the new **Doctor Who** hardback series of books, due for release on September 10th. In *Royal Blood* by Una McCormack, the Doctor and Clara become involved in intrigue and palace politics in the warring city-state of Varuz, whilst Gary Russell's *Big Bang Generation* sees the Doctor arriving in Australia where a 'time portal' opens up in Sydney Cove; the Doctor meets up with a bunch of colourful con artists out to make a killing by claiming ownership of the huge glowing pyramid which has appeared through the portal. In Trevor Baxendale's *Deep Time*, the Doctor and Clara join in a futuristic quest to solve the mystery of the disappearance of an alien species called The Phaeron. The books will retail at £6.99 in the UK and should be available, as they say, in all good bookstores.



How Much is that DALEK in the Window?

Fancy owning a full-size Dalek? A Cyberman? Well, now you have the chance as these and many more will be going under the hammer at the **Prop Store Entertainment Auction** in September. There's also the bust of the Empress of the Racnoss that formed a major part of the **Doctor Who Experience** exhibition and the complete chamois costume worn by Louise Jameson as Leela, which includes arm wraps, leather belt, hip pouch, wedged boots and umm.. matching underwear. If that's too extravagant, how about the Eleventh Doctor's top hat from when he attended his companion's wedding in *The Big Bang*.

The items form part of a collection of over 450 props, costumes and production material from some of the most iconic and famous films such as **Star Wars**, **Superman** and **Star Trek**. The auction itself takes place on September 23rd at the BFI IMAX at Waterloo in London. There will be a free exhibition of over 250 of the auction lots for two weeks prior to the sale at the same venue. For more information, head to **propstore.com**.

Astronomy News: Gallifrey and TARDIS Found on Moon of Pluto!

Doctor Who may receive one of the most extraordinary recognitions of its achievements across its fifty-two-year history as NASA (National Aeronautic and Space Administration) have announced their intention to name areas of Charon, Pluto's third moon, after iconic characters and locations made famous in science fiction film and television. **Star Wars**, **Star Trek**, **Firefly**, **Alien**, and **2001** could all also be recognised on the recommendation of the International Astronomical Union in commemoration of "*destinations and milestones of fictional space and other exploration; fictional and mythological vessels of space and other exploration; fictional and mythological voyagers, travellers and explorers*". **Doctor Who** will be represented, if the proposals are agreed, by the 'TARDIS Chasma' (chasm) which runs alongside the 'Gallifrey Macula' (dark spot) on the surface of Charon.

Olaf Pooley (1914-2015)

Actor Olaf Pooley, who appeared memorably as the obsessed, maniacal Professor Stahlman in 1970's seven-part Jon Pertwee serial Inferno – widely regarded as one of the very best stories from the 'classic' **Doctor Who** series – passed away from congestive heart failure in Los Angeles on July 14th at the age of 101.

Dorset-born Pooley enjoyed a long and successful career not only as an actor, but also as a scriptwriter. He wrote the 1971 horror movie **The Corpse** (retitled **Crucible of Terror** in the United States) which starred Michael Gough and in which Pooley also appeared, and he was an uncredited contributor to the script of notorious 1985 space vampire shocker **Lifeforce**. He appeared extensively in television in series such as **Dixon of Dock Green**, **Paul Temple**, and **Jason King** and after relocating to the United States in 1986, he set up an art studio in Santa Monica where he pursued his love of art and painting. He continued to appear on episodic American TV shows such as **Scarecrow and Mrs King**, **MacGyver**, **Hill Street Blues** and, in his last screen appearance, the 2000 **Star Trek: Voyager** episode *Blink of an Eye*.

Series Ten Delayed?

Outside the Box isn't usually in the business of spreading rumours - just the facts, ma'am - but recently some reports have quickly gained a certain currency in **Doctor Who** fan circles, not least because of the fact that the satirical magazine *Private Eye* has reported 'scurrilous gossip' from behind-the-scenes of **Doctor Who** in the past that has turned out to have slightly more than a grain of truth about it. In an issue published earlier this month, *Private Eye* commented on the imminent return of the series with the caveat that "*fans should make as much as they can of this 12-part run, as BBC staff have recently been informed that showrunner Steven Moffat's commitments to his other hit show* ***Sherlock*** *mean there will be no full series of* ***Doctor Who*** *in 2016*". At the time of writing the BBC had made no formal response to the rumour; *Outside the Box* has already reported this month that a tenth series has been budgeted for by the BBC, but it seems there's now a strong chance that the show will be on reduced duties next year, screening just a handful of special episodes in the style of David Tennant's 2009 year of 'specials' or possibly with the series starting much later in the year or early in 2017. We will report on all developments regarding the future of **Doctor Who** in the coming months.

This Month in DOCTOR WHO

Dates for your diary. This month's **Doctor Who** episodes:

September 19th: BBC One/BBC America:
The Magician's Apprentice
by Steven Moffat.
Directed by Hettie Macdonald.

September 26th: BBC One/BBC America:
The Witch's Familiar
by Steven Moffat.
Directed by Hettie Macdonald.

Ace Event

Following the success of their previous 'A Day in the Life' one-day events featuring appearances by Louise Jameson (Leela) last August and Simon Fisher-Becker (Dorium Maldovar) in January, Cardiff-based **Doctor Who** fan group Timeless has announced that a similar event will be held at the Penarth Pier Pavilion Cinema (near Cardiff, **Doctor Who**'s current production home) on Sunday, September 13th. 'A Day in the Life of Sophie Aldred' will see the popular actress who played the Doctor's street-savvy companion Ace during the era of Seventh Doctor Sylvester McCoy talking about her career and her time on the series, followed by a Q&A session, autograph opportunities, charity raffle and dealer's table. The event runs from 11.30am to 4pm, with tickets available at **penarthpavilion.co.uk** costing £12 for adults and £8 for children (early bird discounts are available) with all proceeds donated to the upkeep of the refurbished Pavilion Cinema.

DOCTOR WHO on the Big Screen!

Fans of **Doctor Who** in the United States will get the opportunity to 'enjoy' the two-part Series Eight climax – *Dark Water* and *Death in Heaven* – at special 3D screenings of the episodes at around 700 theatres across the country. The episodes will be screening on September 15th and 16th and will also feature *The Doctor's Meditation*, a special Series Nine preview scene, and an exclusive interview with stars Peter Capaldi and Jenna Coleman (Clara) hosted by former **Star Trek: the Next Generation** star Wil Wheaton. The screenings have been arranged by BBC Worldwide North America in association with Fathom Events and screening details and ticket availability can be found at **FathomEvents.com**.

UP POMPEII!

The mystery deepens as Series Nine of *Doctor Who* approaches! For when we first saw the Twelfth Doctor, he was wearing a familiar face. One we had in fact last seen on Lobus Caecilius, the marble merchant from *The Fires of Pompeii*. Of course, that was two selves ago from the Doctor's perspective.

But consider the newest incarnation's conversation with Barney the tramp in *Deep Breath* and it becomes apparent that he's seen his new features before somewhere. It's that somewhere that we'll be examining here, so hold on tight as we dive head-first into '*volcano day*'...

BARNEY: Oh, it's cold.
DOCTOR: That's right. It's cold. It's cold, I knew it was a thing. I need um, I need clothes. I need clothes, that's what I need. And a big, long scarf. No, no, move on from that. Looked stupid. Err, have you seen this face before?
BARNEY: No.
DOCTOR: Are you sure?
BARNEY: Sir, I have never seen that face.
DOCTOR: It's funny, because I'm sure that I have. You know, I never know where the faces come from. They just pop up. Zap. Faces like this one. Come on, look at it, have a look, come on, look, look, look. Look, it's covered in lines. But I didn't do the frowning. Who frowned me this face? Do you ever look in the mirror and think 'I've seen that face before'?
BARNEY: Yes.
DOCTOR: Really? When?
BARNEY: Well, every time I look in the mirror.
DOCTOR: Oh, yes, yes, yes. Fair enough. Good point. My face is fresh on, though.
BARNEY: Err...
DOCTOR: Why this one? Why did I choose this face? It's like I'm trying to tell myself something. Like I'm trying to make a point. But what is so important that I can't just tell myself what I'm thinking?

Our next logical question might be exactly what the point he's trying so hard to make to himself is.

Early on, he had seemed concerned with a rather big question of morality - is he a good man? His actions while wearing an earlier, younger-looking sideburn-sporting face in Pompeii would seem to suggest that he at least tries to be, even if it took a rather big tearful nudge from then-companion Donna Noble to stop him condemning everyone to fiery death as Mount Vesuvius erupted.

CAECILIUS: God save us, Doctor!
DONNA: No! Doctor, you can't! Doctor! You can't just leave them!
DOCTOR: Don't you think I've done enough? History's back in place and everyone dies.
DONNA: You've got to go back! Doctor, I'm telling you, take this thing back! It's not fair.
DOCTOR: No, it's not.

And who were the beneficiaries of that change of tack? Caecilius and his family! Which earned the younger Doctor a spot as the god of his household, the TARDIS his temple, following a messianic rescue from the flames. "***Come with me.***"

Echoes of that abound in *Kill The Moon* as he does the unthinkable and seemingly abandons humanity to make a decision regarding that odd egg-moon – though perhaps seeing that familiar set of features eventually reminds him of a responsibility to step up and at least try to be the good man he aspires to. Indeed, perhaps that's the whole heart of the mystery, a stark visual reminder of the good he's done through all his lives even in the face of seemingly insurmountable odds.

CLARA: So what do we do? Doctor? Huh? Doctor, what do we do?
DOCTOR: Nothing.
CLARA: What?
DOCTOR: We don't do anything. I'm sorry, Clara. I can't help you.
CLARA: Of course you can help.
DOCTOR: The Earth isn't my home. The Moon's not my moon. Sorry.
CLARA: Come on. Hey!
DOCTOR: Listen, there are moments in every civilisation's history in which the whole path of that civilisation is decided. The whole future path. Whatever future humanity might have depends upon the choice that is made right here and right now. Now, you've got the tools to kill it. You made them. You brought them up here all on your own, with your own ingenuity. You don't need a Time Lord. Kill it. Or let it live. I can't make this decision for you.

Of course he knew what he was doing in the grand scheme of things. Much as he thought he did a lot earlier in his personal timeline...

DONNA: But if it's aliens setting off the volcano, doesn't that make it all right, for you to stop it?
DOCTOR: Still part of history.
DONNA: But I'm history to you. You saved me, in 2008, you saved us all. Why's that different?
DOCTOR: Some things are fixed, some things are in flux. Pompeii is fixed.
DONNA: How do you know which is which?
DOCTOR: Because that's how I see the universe. Every waking second, I can see what is, what was, what could be, what must not. That's the burden of the Time Lord, Donna. And I'm the only one left.
DONNA: How many people died?
DOCTOR: Stop it.
DONNA: Doctor, how many people died?
DOCTOR: 20,000.
DONNA: Is that what you can see, Doctor? All 20,000? And you think that's all right, do you?

And now the man who once bought a certain '*box, big blue box, big blue wooden box*' to display as '*Modern art*' ahead of a visit from Lucius Petrus Dextrus, Chief Augur of Pompeii and also a leader of sorts to the Cult of Vulcan, is in charge of its controls.

Vulcan, not inconsequently, is the Roman god of fire. And what did we see lots of in that first trailer for the Twelfth Doctor's maiden series? Great big walls of flame...

"***The blue box - a temple made of wood. And yet, the Sybil foretold that the box would appear at the time of storms, and fire, and betrayal.***"

Which it did, and if rumour is to be believed, could again. Giving truth to some of the last words spoken by the Doctor to the man whose face he'd later pinch!

"***It's never forgotten, Caecilius. Oh, time will pass, men will move on, and stories will fade. But one day, Pompeii will be found again. In thousands of years. And everyone will remember you.***"

Much time has indeed passed from when he left, having since regenerated into someone who looks familiar and first creased those 'attack eyebrows' in anger. But will the lessons learned two selves ago stick? Should he return at a point before or after the ash cloud blankets the place?

"***I don't know. Isn't that brilliant? I love not knowing. Keeps me on my toes. It must be awful being a prophet, waking up every morning, 'Is it raining? Yes it is, I said so.' Takes all the fun out of life.***"

Never was a truer word spoken. Luckily for us, we know nothing of the mystery of the new/old face yet. Though time will tell. It always does!

CHRISTOPHER MORLEY

STAR WARS

THE ANTICIPATION AWAKENS

BY ANDREW POLLARD

Chances are, if you're not ready to venture to a galaxy far, far away by this stage then you never will be. And for those of you like us who can't wait to get strapped in and see what adventures lie ahead, there's a whole lot of STAR WARS on the horizon...

First up, obviously, is J. J. Abrams' **Star Wars: Episode VII – The Force Awakens**, which is due to hit screens this December. After that, there's the prospect of **Episodes VIII** and **IX**, plus three **Anthology** movies. So strap in alongside us as we hit lightspeed and look ahead to what you can expect to see from the biggest and best sci-fi franchise of all time. Sorry, Trekkers.

The Magnificent Seven

Ever since Disney purchased Lucasfilm from George Lucas for an astronomical amount of money that even an MP would struggle to hide, the intentions were clear from the House of Mouse that we would get to see more **Star Wars**. In fairness to Lucas, The Beard gave the majority of cash away as he chuckled off into the sunset, leaving his creations in the hands of Uncle Walt. And in fairness to Disney, they took their time in getting the right team together to bring some respectful new additions to the **Star Wars** movie franchise. So it was set, a new trilogy of films was confirmed.

To many long-standing fans of Lucas' prized space opera, the prospect of new entries in the **Star Wars** franchise was something that was about as welcome as the news of a deceased loved one. On the other hand, there were those who had spent years wanting to see where the cinematic paths of Luke Skywalker and Co. took them (especially with the Expanded Universe now deemed basically irrelevant). With J. J. Abrams, best known for genre efforts such as **Cloverfield**, **Super 8** and **Star Trek** (that *other* sci-fi biggie), on board to direct, there was, dare we say it, a new hope that catching up with some familiar faces could actually be rather fun.

Now known as **Stat Wars – The Force Awakens**, plot details still remain a little hazy around the edges when it comes to Abrams' film. We know that it takes place 30 years after the events of **Return of the Jedi** and that a whole host of fan favourites are back, most notably Mark Hamill's Luke Skywalker, Harrison Ford's Han Solo, Carrie Fisher's Leia, the usual droids, and everyone's favourite walking carpet, Chewbacca (which also means the return of Peter Mayhew). What we do know about the plot, however, is that Luke has become more powerful than near-enough anyone who has ever lived, managing to tap into the Force in a way that no one has done before. As such, he is a tad volatile and causes damage when not meaning to; so he has done what any good Jedi Knight would do and gone into a self-imposed solitary confinement on a distant planet. With a new Sith presence starting to rear its head, the race is on to track down Luke as forces both good and bad hope to persuade the uber-powerful Jedi to join their ranks.

After much speculation, Adam Driver's mystery role has been confirmed to be that of Kylo Ren, supposedly the main villain of **Episode VII**. Additionally though, it was also believed that Driver was playing one of the children of Han and Leia, with speculation that this young Solo ends up going rogue and joining the Dark Side after an infatuation with the now-deceased Darth Vader leads to him heading up the treacherous First Order. Adding further fuel to the speculation over Driver's role is that he has been pictured on the **Episode VII** set as an X-Wing pilot, meaning that he will spend at least some of the film working with the good guys. Whether this is all just a ruse or if it's a case of him getting fed up of his surroundings, we'll have to wait and see. On the topic of the Solo kids, there's also rumours that Daisy Ridley's Rey, supposedly from the desert planet of Jakku and to be accompanied by the rolling BB-8 droid, is indeed the daughter of Han and Leia. Like much of the stories around **Star Wars: Episode VII**, that's yet to be confirmed though. We do know that Ridley's Rey will happen across John Boyega's Finn early in the film, with Finn a Stormtrooper who wants to fight for the good guys. The pair reportedly happen across a lost lightsaber and end up on a mission that also involves Han Solo and Chewbacca, with Gwendoline Christie's Captain Phasma on her own mission to track down the AWOL Finn. Also crossing paths with Finn will be another newcomer, that being Oscar Isaac's Poe Dameron, who is one of the best X-Wing pilots in the galaxy and is given a mission directly from Leia. Then there's the CGI-heavy role of Maz Kanata, a member of the good guys played **12 Years a Slave**'s by Lupita Nyong'o. On one final newcomer to **Star Wars**, there's plenty of speculation about Domhnall Gleeson's (we're still really, *really* sorry for that **Doctor Who** stuff, Dom) character, General Hux. The general consensus is that he'll be playing the 'Son of Skywalker'. Yep, Luke has a kid. Thing is, it looks as if Hux is working for both the Rebels and the Imperial Forces, acting as a dual agent of sorts who's out to rid the galaxy of all giant weapons. There's even talk of him doing bad things for good reasons, meaning the role has the potential to be one of the more interesting of the new characters.

As mentioned, a lot of the stories surrounding **The Force Awakens** are rumours and calculated speculation from apparent insiders. But that's half of the fun; there's nothing quite like the wow factor of being blown away by the twists and turns of what lies ahead, with us all getting to experience the action first hand when **Star Wars: Episode VII – The Force Awakens** crashes in to cinemas on December 18th.

Anthologising

After revisiting old friends and making some new ones in **Episode VII**, attention then turns to the first of the **Star Wars Anthology** movies. Entitled **Rogue One**, work is already under way on the film with **Monsters** and **Godzilla**'s Gareth Edwards on directing duties. Set between **Revenge of the Sith** and **A New Hope** (or just plain old **Star Wars** to the more traditionalist of us out there), the plot will see a group of Rebels involved in a mission to snatch the plans to the Death Star. Sound a little familiar? Fear not, for we've been promised something special that will have an almost-military vibe to it and will also feature several pesky bounty hunters. Hired by Ben Mendelsohn's 'big bad' Moff (not to be confused with something you'd see in a classic John Holmes movie) to retrieve the plans from the sneaky Rebels (yep, they'll apparently have some form of initial success in their mission), we'll get to see scum-of-the-galaxy bounty hunters in the shape of Bossk, Dengar, Zuckuss, 4-LOM, IG-88 and **Clone Wars**' Cad Bane. Oh, and a little known chap by the name of Boba Fett! Yes, everyone's favourite Mandalorian is returning to the big screen and will be tasked with tracking down the thieving Rebels. Also worthy of note, **Rogue One** will feature an appearance of sorts by Darth Vader. The-artist-formerly-known-as-Anakin-Skywalker's appearance is believed to only be a cameo one, likely just as a hologram in contact with Mendelsohn's Moff. Other cast members confirmed at this point are **The Theory of Everything**'s Felicity Jones (who also popped up as Felicia Hardy in the recent doomed **Amazing Spider-Man** franchise), **Elysium**'s Diego Luna, **The Hunger Games**' Sam Claflin, **Four Lions**' Riz Ahmed and Oscar-winner Forest Whittaker. These additions are all believed to be on the side of the good guys, working as part of the Rebel Alliance. Following a year after **Episode VII**, **Star Wars Anthology: Rogue One** is currently slated to his screens on December 16th, 2016.

For those of you who crave yet another Boba Fett fix, it's believed that the character could very well be playing a significant role in the second **Star Wars Anthology** movie. What's even more interesting is that the currently-untitled film has been confirmed to be focusing its attention on everyone's favourite scruffy-looking nerf herder, Han Solo. With **The LEGO Movie**'s Phil Lord and Chris Miller on board to direct, the script for the second **Anthology** film has already been penned by **The Empire Strikes Back**'s Lawrence Kasdan and **Freaks and Geeks**' Jon Kasdan. The action will centre on *"how young Han Solo becomes the smuggler, thief and scoundrel whom Luke Skywalker and Obi-Wan Kenobi first encountered in the cantina in Mos Eisley."* What's that noise? That's the iconic Cantina Band song playing in your head right now. The film was originally to be helmed by **Chronicle** and **Fantastic Four**'s Josh Trank before he mysteriously departed the project amid rumours that **Star Wars** producer Simon Kinberg wasn't happy with what he'd seen from Trank on 20th Century Fox's **Fantastic Four** redo, and there's long-standing rumours that the young Han will find himself tangling with the aforementioned Fett. And yes, with the film looking at a younger Solo that means we'll be getting a new actor taking over from Harrison Ford as one of the most iconic characters in cinema history. Early speculation has thrown up **Drive**'s Ryan Gosling and **Breaking Bad**'s Aaron Paul as two possible candidates for the Han gig. Whoever *does* take over from Ford certainly has some giant-sized shoes to fill. With release details a little hazy at this point, it looks as if the Han Solo-centred second **Star Wars Anthology** movie could be released on May 25th, 2018. As well as that, a third **Anthology** film is planned for further down the line, with that movie rumoured to focus on either Yoda, Obi-Wan Kenobi or be a flat-out solo Boba Fett effort.

Triple Threat

Taking things back to **Episode VII – The Force Awakens**, we've also got **Episode VIII** and **IX** to come as well, concluding another trilogy of **Star Wars** movies for eager fans. Plot details for the second and third parts of this new **Star Wars** trilogy are extremely vague at this point, with all involved keeping schtum, obviously to avoid any potential spoilers for **The Force Awakens**. It goes without saying that what goes down in **Episode VII** will clearly have a major influence on how things develop going forward with **Episodes VIII** and **IX**. There is, however, a rumour doing the rounds that says **The Usual Suspects**, **Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas**, **The Wolfman**, **Che**, and **Guardians of the Galaxy**'s Benicio del Toro has been offered the role of **Episode VIII**'s big bad, although that's yet to be confirmed at this stage. What we *do* know about the rest of this latest trilogy, though, is who will be directing them. **Brick** and **Looper**'s Rian Johnson will be helming **Star Wars: Episode VIII**, whilst **Jurassic World**'s Colin Trevorrow is hotly rumoured to be announced shortly as being the man tasked with directing **Episode IX**. That said, there was some talk of having J. J. Abrams possibly returning to oversee **Episode IX**. Confirmation on that topic is expected shortly, though. In terms of release info, **Star Wars: Episode VIII** is currently pencilled in for May 2017, with **Episode IX** arriving at some point in 2019.

So there you have it: enough **Star Wars** info to satiate the appetite of a Hutt! With six movies on the horizon, it's a good time to be a **Star Wars** fan. But then again, it's always a good time be a **Star Wars** fan. Well, apart from where **Attack of the Clones** is concerned. Now excuse us whilst we sit back and enjoy a glass of blue milk as we wait for December to roll around.

The countdown to the December 18th release of STAR WARS: EPISODE VII – THE FORCE AWAKENS continues...

"flushed with the success of his weekly underwater adventure Voyage to the Bottom of the Sea, producer Irwin Allen looked to the stars for his second science fiction saga"

DANGER! 50 YEARS LOST IN SPACE

By Robin Pierce

1997 was a tumultuous year by any standard. World events included Bill Clinton starting his second Presidential term while a few months later, Tony Blair became the UK's Prime Minister. Princess Diana lost her life in a car crash in Paris, a gallon of petrol cost an average of £2.80, Hong Kong decided to kill all the chickens within its territory in a bid to stamp out Avian Influenza, Microsoft became the world's most valuable company, *Titanic* was the top grossing movie and the Robinsons became the first family to be launched into space to colonise a strange planet.

Or at least that last one was what happened in Irwin Allen's version of 1997 as seen from his vantage point in 1965.

These Robinsons weren't the first Robinson family to be drifting along in space with no way of getting home, though. That concept was originally introduced in a comic titled *The Space Family Robinson* published by Gold Key Comics from 1962, predating Allen's TV series. Despite adding '*Lost in Space*' to the comic title from issue #15 (January 1965), the comic was never based on, nor had any tie-in with, the show, but an agreement was reached because Gold Key held the lucrative comic licences for several of the TV network's other shows, and neither party ever sued the other for copyright infringement.

Both properties were based, albeit loosely, on the classic adventure *The Swiss Family Robinson* written by Johann David Wyss in 1812 about a family of Swiss settlers who become marooned on an uninhabited island in the East Indies following a shipwreck.

So, flushed with the success of his weekly underwater adventure *Voyage to the Bottom of the Sea*, producer Irwin Allen looked to the stars for his second science fiction saga and adapted Wyss' tale for the space age. Allen's version of the colonist Robinson family would be marooned on another planet.

Let's start at the beginning…

As was his custom, a fifty-minute pilot film was produced and directed by Irwin Allen at 20th Century Fox for the CBS network. This was basically a 'show and tell' exercise to attract sponsors. This concept movie was subtitled *No Place to Hide*. It introduced the family and set the scene, but there were several tweaks that would be introduced before the series went into production.

Opening with Bernard Herrmann's score for *The Day the Earth Stood Still* (1951) we are in Alpha Control to witness the first family out of a projected ten million per year to colonise Alpha Centauri in a bid to ease overpopulation on the Earth. The Robinsons have been chosen for, among other qualities, their pioneering spirit and their emotional stability. (We guess nobody had the heart to tell Irwin that Alpha Centauri is a star, and not a planet - but according to the pilot, that's where they're headed)

Aboard the Gemini 12 are the patriarch of the clan, Professor John Robinson (Guy Williams, familiar to sixties audiences after playing the title role in Disney's *Zorro* from 1957 - 1961). His wife Maureen (June Lockhart - typecast as a typical American 'Mom' of the period after a six-year stint playing that very type on the *Lassie* TV series, where she was upstaged by the collie every week), despite her character having a doctorate! Maureen was sadly relegated to housewife chores for the run of the series. While the kids and menfolk were having adventures, Maureen would either be cooking, washing or fretting.

The eldest daughter was nineteen-year-old Judy (Marta Kristen - a jobbing actress who had appeared in several series as a one-off guest, but this would be her first regular role). The middle child was eleven-year-old Penny (Angela Cartwright - the younger sister of *Alien* actress Veronica Cartwright - who was fresh from her success as Brigitta in *The Sound of Music*, and had been in show business since the age of four). The youngest of the group was Will, kind of a child prodigy played by Billy Mumy - a talented child actor already known to fans for his stunning performances in three different episodes of *The Twilight Zone*.

"CBS bought the pilot, declining the other option on offer - a little thing called Star Trek"

Also on board was Doctor (later Major) Donald West (Mark Goddard). A young, brash hero being mentored by the older, wiser leading man and the cause of dramatic conflict. Also, of course, a love interest for Judy.

Positioned in their glass capsules on board the futuristic single-level spaceship, the crew are placed in suspended animation for their 98-year journey, which in their cryogenically frozen time will be but a few minutes.

Very soon into their flight, they encounter a meteor storm which throws them off course (although they bounce off the hull of the ship, they cause no structural damage - not even a cosmetic scratch or a chip on the windows) and they crash land on a planet... somewhere. Alpha Control presumes them dead or lost. Either way, they're written off. What follows is a frantically paced epic as the family struggle to survive in a hostile environment with rapidly changing climate and one-eyed giants.

CBS bought the pilot, declining the other option on offer - a little thing called *Star Trek* which eventually found its way to rival network NBC - but there were some changes that needed to be made before the series went to production and the opening episode needed a substantial overhaul. However, never one to waste and a keen practitioner of recycling before it ever became fashionable, Allen used most of the footage from *No Place To Hide* in four of the first five episodes to be aired.

When the series debuted in a prime time slot on Wednesday September 15th with its re-imagined pilot, the cause of the Robinsons' loss in space and the eternal thorn in their side also made his first appearance. Enter Dr Zachary Smith.

Jonathan Harris was a character actor, specialising in eccentric, cowardly and villainous roles. He had co-starred with Michael Rennie in *The Third Man* series from 1959 - 1965 when he was summoned to Allen's offices and offered the role of Smith. A contractual stumbling block was the billing - the rest of the cast were already signed up and their billing order on the credits was set. It seemed that Harris would have no option but to accept the last and lowest credit. Harris agreed to think about it, and ever the opportunist asked that he be credited as a special guest star - every week - for the duration of the series. This had never been done before, and was completely unheard of. Allen reluctantly agreed.

The final cast member to be added was the robot. Specifically, a Class M-3 General Utility Non-Theorising Environmental Control Robot, model B-9 (as in benign, we guess). The robot suit was designed by Robert Kinoshita who had created the iconic *Robby the Robot* for MGM's *Forbidden Planet* in 1956. It comprised of a glass bubble head on a stalk with a turret midsection consisting of a light-up chest display, controls, extendable arm with claws capable of delivering lethal electric shocks, and below that, 'legs' which ended in caterpillar-tracked 'feet' which housed a mechanism for taking geological soil samples. B-9 had telemetry sensors which somehow would allow it to sense impending danger. How exactly these could detect the threat level was never explained, but it was always fun to see the robot wave its arms while shouting *"Danger... Danger"*. Inside the suit was Bob May peering out of the neck section and a 'Panama shorts' version of the suit was used for close ups (these had the rubberised leg assembly cut off just below the knee to allow May to walk, but were sometimes visible in the shot). For long shots, he would wear the full suit, including the tracked 'feet', and was pulled along by a cable. The sombrely toned voice was provided by Dick Tufeld.

Kinoshita also redesigned the Gemini 12 interior. Now known as the Jupiter 2, it was still a sleek saucer shape on the outside, but the interior was now two levels. The top level was the control area, while the lower housed the galley and living quarters. One burning question, of course, is why are the *first* family in space going aboard the *second* craft in the Jupiter line? What happened to the Jupiter 1?

The answer can be found in an interesting piece of *Lost in Space* merchandise, *The Alpha Control Reference Manual* by William Anchors and Gary Stork (published in 1986), which tells us that the Jupiter 1 exploded on a test flight on March 10th, 1993, killing all aboard.

The first season was shot in black and white to save production costs, with the exception of some of the special effects and model shots, which were filmed in colour and so could (and would) be re-

"Over the next few episodes, Dr Smith would lose his homicidal edge and become a more comic villain"

used in subsequent seasons. Gone was Bernard Herrmann's eerie Theremin-heavy music, replaced by a more fun, upbeat score by one Johnny Williams, who would become better known worldwide just over a decade later when he shortened his name and scored the likes of *Jaws* and *Star Wars* as John Williams.

The opening episode was *The Reluctant Stowaway*, which sets the scene for the following 30 episode season. The Robinsons are, as before, the first family to be sent into space to colonise Alpha Centauri (evidently, nobody had yet worked up the courage to break the news to Irwin that this would be a grievous error) and they are given a final check by Dr Zachary Smith. What they don't know is that Smith is an enemy agent working for an unfriendly foreign power and his mission is to sabotage the flight by programming the robot to awaken while the Robinsons are cryogenically frozen and destroy the Jupiter 2 guidance systems. However, Smith is himself accidentally trapped on board as the ship blasts off. So, a combination of Smith's extra weight, the robot destroying a number of control panels PLUS accidentally veering in to a meteor shower is what causes the Robinsons' troubles. The Robinsons seem to accept Smith's feeble excuses and the fact that he wakes them up out of hypersleep to save his own hide rather too easily - or they're just too forgiving for their own good. One can't help but feel that a real family would've taken the good doctor on a one-way walk to the airlock. In fact, for a time it was planned that Dr Smith would be killed off early in the season, but Jonathan Harris had other ideas and ensured the character's longevity with his performance.

The episode closed with a cliff-hanging predicament, as John Robinson was floating in his spacesuit, outside the ship, trying to make a repair, when his line snapped and a grim warning reminded us to tune in next week. This would be the format for all the episodes for the first two seasons. It worked particularly well with the first few episodes, which had an overall arc, but as the season progressed, they became more of a teaser for the next episode.

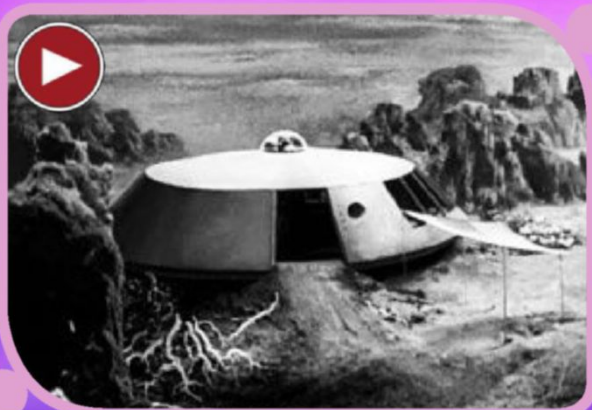
The second episode, *The Derelict*, saw the Robinsons drawn into a huge, cavernous spaceship inhabited by strange creatures composed of plastic bags. Smith's cowardice almost costs the Robinsons their lives for a second week in a row, due to his eagerness to save his own skin. This episode stands apart from the introductory arc, but we were back on track in the third, *Island in the Sky*, in which the Jupiter 2 crash lands on the unknown planet where it'll remain stranded for the remainder of the season. The model shots of the ship breaking the clouds, skimming to a landing were filmed at Monument Valley and are still impressive today.

The Robinsons establish a base camp, defended by a force field generator (a prop which was also regularly seen in the Batcave in the sixties *Batman* series) and begin to explore their surroundings by means of a jet pack - the real deal, a Bell Aerosystems rocket belt to give it its full name. It was also seen in the Bond film *Thunderball* (1965), though in reality, it could only stay aloft for 20 seconds. For longer range exploring, the Space Chariot was used - an all-terrain, amphibious tracked vehicle which housed the robot in the back - though we never understood how the robot actually entered or exited, nor was it ever shown.

The planet (now named Priplanus) is unstable to say the least, and hosts an indigenous race of fifty-foot Cyclops creatures. The climate veers from scorching droughts to sub-Antarctic freezes with earthquakes, torrential rain and flash floods punctuating the hot and cold. This provides the drama for *There Were Giants in the Earth* and *The Hungry Sea*, episodes four and five.

Then, something happened and the series changed its course. Up to this point, the robot was a henchman, more or less under the control of Dr Smith, who was still the truly evil villain of the piece and would think nothing of programming the robot to kill the family one by one as the opportunity arose. But after *The Hungry Sea*, the climate on Priplanus calmed down as did the freak electrical storms and earthquakes and these life threatening elements were never mentioned again. Seemingly, the Cyclops were wiped out as well.

Over the next few episodes, Dr Smith would lose his homicidal edge and become a more comic villain. The cold blooded assassin who tried to wipe out the entire Robinson clan, including the children, became a family-friendly foil for the robot.



"The Bat-fuelled camp craze disappeared as quickly as it had arrived, but the damage had been done"

This happened to the extent that although receiving top billing, Guy Williams's John Robinson would become as much of a background character as Maureen, with most of the episodes centring around Will, Dr Smith, and the robot, who were the firm audience favourites. Though you have to question John and Maureen's parenting skills and choices in allowing an enemy hit man to become virtually a nanny to their youngest child.

As the season progressed, episodes centred on various cast members. Penny's adventures with an invisible cosmic force in *My Friend, Mr Nobody*, and a mystical world that exists in *The Magic Mirror* had an innocent, fairy tale quality, while Judy was the damsel in distress, duplicated by giant cyclamen plants in *Attack of the Monster Plants*, and saved from a hairy monster (which we had seen previously on *Voyage to the Bottom of the Sea*) by a space dog in *One of Our Dogs is Missing*.

Meanwhile, Smith took centre stage. He discovered a machine to make all his dreams come true, encountered what he thought was the troubled spirit of his late Uncle Thaddeus, became a giant, was almost traded to an alien, became the ruler of an alien society but then was almost sacrificed due to his total uselessness and also found himself with a variation of the Midas touch. Harris was even reunited with his *Third Man* co-star Michael Rennie in the series' only two-part episode, *The Keeper*.

Even the robot had his own adventures when he battled Robby the Robot in *War of the Robots*. Will came back to Earth for a Capra-esque Christmas episode, was challenged to a duel by a young Kurt Russell and saved the family time and time again while the now marginalised 'adults' John, Maureen and Don West sort of filled in the background in group shots - usually at the beginning and end of each episode.

The second season was an eruption of colour. Priplanus is about to explode, but the family escape just in time in the newly repaired Jupiter 2, but sadly it soon crashes on another planet. This new planet was exactly the same as the previous, except that, well, it was in colour.

As with the first season, it's apparent that just about every type of being in the galaxy can land on that planet. None of them help the Robinsons repair their ship, but John is always happy to hand over what must be vital parts from the Jupiter 2 to help others, surely setting back his own escape and that of his family to a safer place indefinitely. Sadly, the second season is also where *Lost in Space* REALLY lost its way.

Batman, another show from 20th Century Fox, had debuted on ABC and its style of straight-laced heroes, over-the-top villainy, absurd situations and garish bright colours had sparked off a craze that blazed through the world of popular culture. In a bad creative decision that similarly affected other TV series of the time, *Lost in Space* would follow the camp craze and introduce the same type of humour. If Williams, Lockhart and Goddard had been underused in the first season, then they would be almost redundant in the second.
The stories became increasingly bizarre - it seemed that the Jupiter 2 had enough storage space for whatever props Smith needed to fulfil his whims. Over the course of the thirty-odd episodes, Smith would meet a green alien girl Athena (Vitina Marcus), who was smitten with Dr Smith and would appear a couple of times; also making a couple of appearances were Dee Hartford as a female android and Fritz Feld as Zumdish, the eccentric manager of an intergalactic Celestial Department Store. It wasn't all bad - there were some solid episodes, like *The Golden Man*, which was a lesson about judging by appearances and the ensuing prejudice. *The Mechanical Men* of the episode title exchanged the personalities of Smith and the robot, and *The Munsters'* Al Lewis played an inept magician in *Rocket to Earth*.

The true low points of the season were almost surreal in their stupidity. *The Space Vikings* saw Smith pitted against Thor, the God of Thunder, while *The Questing Beast* featured a strange female dragon being hunted by a space age Don Quixote and was almost a pantomime. Even Dr Smith's Cousin Jeremiah dropped by to try and swindle him out of an inheritance (this, of course, despite the family being hopelessly lost in the cosmos).

The Bat-fuelled camp craze disappeared as quickly as it had arrived, but the damage had been done. *Lost in Space* had lost the credibility as an outer space adventure that it had gained in 1965. The third season, which ran from 1967-68, was more space-bound with the Jupiter 2 operational again. John Williams had

"The Great Vegetable Rebellion had Stanley Adams guest starring as, literally, a carrot monster"

written a new, more urgent and dramatic theme and the titles had changed to a more eye catching montage of photos which started with a countdown.

The stories tried to recapture the dramatic tension of the first season, but it was too little, too late, despite strong episodes like *The Time Merchant*, in which Smith travels back to Earth just before the ship's launch, so altering his own destiny. He discovers that without his extra weight, a miscalculation at Alpha Control would've caused the Jupiter 2 to crash into an asteroid, killing all on board. He decides to make the sacrifice and leave things as they were, thus saving the family's lives.

Episodes featuring cyborgs, evil duplicates of the Robinsons, Will's innermost fears and phobias becoming real, and John Robinson being hunted as game did little to soften the blow of space hippies, space beauty contests, space zoos, the robot falling for a deadly female robot or Smith turning the ship into a hotel.

The final indignity had to be the penultimate episode and a low point for TV in general. *The Great Vegetable Rebellion* had Stanley Adams guest starring as, literally, a carrot monster in an episode which sees Smith turned into a human stick of celery. As Mark Goddard said, seven years of training as a method actor resulted in him talking to a carrot.

Unsurprisingly, the audience demographic was changing. The adults weren't tuning in but a greater number of children were - not the target audience for the advertisers. With diminishing audiences and increasing budgetary costs per episode, the die was cast.

After three years and 85 episodes, the show was cancelled, leaving the Robinsons, West, Smith, and robot still out there, somewhere. On hearing the news, June Lockhart was reported as saying: "*I think it's for the best at this time*".

The show still retains its popularity to this day and for a generation of fans, the sarcastic exchanges between Smith and the robot will never fail to raise a smile of wistful nostalgia.

Dr Zachary Smith: "Now then my dear friend. I should like to hear a brief, but compelling statement on the sterling character of one Zachary Smith."
The Robot: "Does not compute."
Dr Zachary Smith: "Spare me the editorial comments."

Exchange from *Return from Outer Space*
(Season One, Episode 15)

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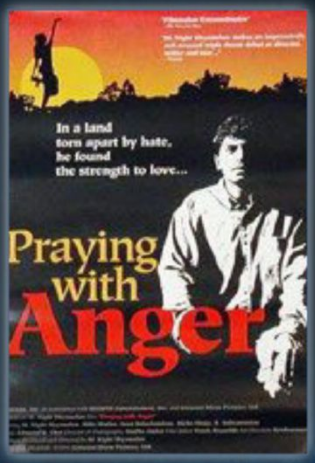
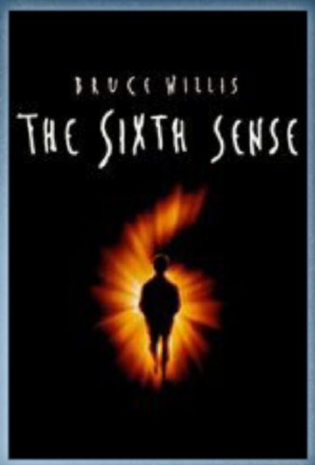




TWISTING THE NIGHT AWAY

BY ED FORTUNE

With the imminent release of THE VISIT, the latest from M. NIGHT SHYAMALAN, we take the opportunity to look back over his cinematic ups and downs...

Manoj Shyamalan, known to the world as M. Night Shyamalan, is a figure of some controversy. The director is famed for putting twist endings into movies with a decidedly genre flavour. Despite a solid track record for producing commercial successes, his features are rarely hits with the critics. People love to poke holes in Shyamalan's movies, and yet we keep coming back for more.

Shyamalan made his directorial debut with 1992's *Praying with Anger*, a partially autobiographical piece about an Indian-American raised in the US, who visits India in order to reconnect with his family. It's a coming of age movie, and a rather rudimentary one. However, it was enough to catch the attention of the industry at the Toronto Film Festival. It's also notable that some of the key themes in Shyamalan's work can be found here. Namely those of miscommunication and spirituality. Shyamalan also starred in the movie and he would continue to insert himself into his features throughout his career.

Praying with Anger got the director the job of writing (and eventually directing) the Rosie O'Donnell vehicle *Wide Awake.* The script was finished in 1992, and the feature made three years later, but wasn't released until 1998. It's a deeply unfunny comedy about a child who teams up with a baseball-playing nun in order to find God. If that sounds like a laugh riot to you, you're probably one of the few people who have seen this feature; it was Shyamalan's one and only movie to make a huge loss.

Though Shyamalan found work in the industry (including scriptwriting duties on *Stuart Little*), it would take remarkable luck for Shyamalan to recover from his early failures. That came in the form of then-president of production at Walt Disney Studios, David Vogel. The veteran producer had frequently been at loggerheads with Disney whilst he was there. He surprised his colleagues by not only buying Shyamalan's script for *The Sixth Sense* for a record $2.2M, but by also ensuring that Shyamalan would have a shot at directing the feature. Vogel left Disney shortly after the deal was made and the House of Mouse was quick to sell the whole project to Spyglass Entertainment.

Vogel's instincts were right on the money. The (now classic) ghost story about a boy who can talk to the dead made $673M at the box office. The performances of both Haley Joel

Osment (as the child) and Bruce Willis (as the child's psychologist) have been described as career defining for both actors, and *The Sixth Sense* is quite rightly regarded as one of Shyamalan's greatest films.

The director would go on to impress audiences with 2000's *Unbreakable.* It's an odd story; Bruce Willis plays security guard David Dunn, who is convinced by an eccentric entrepreneur called Elijah Price (Samuel L Jackson) that he possesses extraordinary strength and durability. Price suffers from a disease that makes him physically fragile, and the two make an unlikely team. The slow pace and philosophical dialogue put off some movie goers, but critics praised the feature for its intelligent reimagining of the superhero myth. The public agreed. It's at this point that the narrative about Shyamalan's movies would begin; critics and movie journalists decided that his features were an acquired taste and much of the talk surrounding all his work from this point would describe him as a creator that you would either love or hate, with no middle ground.

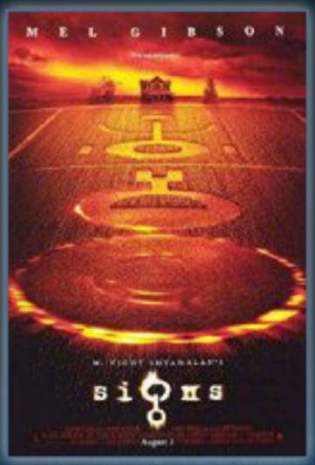
2002's *Signs* confirmed this bias for many. The movie initially looks to be about alien invaders, the signs of the title being mysteriously appearing crop circles. As the paranoia ramps up, it swiftly becomes apparent that aliens actually do exist. Like *Unbreakable* before it, *Signs* breaks the mould for movies of its genre. The extraterrestrial invaders are used as a way for the characters to explore their own fears. The central story is that of Graham Hess (Mel Gibson) rediscovering his faith after the death of his wife. Though sci-fi fans love to nit-pick various key plot points, *Signs* was lapped up by the movie-going public and did very well at the box office.

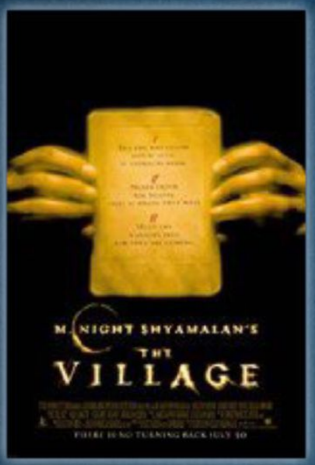
By the time we got to 2004's *The Village,* moviegoers were starting to develop a touch of fatigue when it came to twist endings. It's the tale of the people of a 19th century village who live in isolation, as there are horrible monsters in the woods. The appropriately spooky soundtrack got nominated for an Oscar, and it is a popular choice amongst Shyamalan's die-hard fans. Critics panned it for its lack of strong themes; despite a narrative about surveillance and security, no new ground is broken and some felt the movie was rather tepid. *The Village* also generated some bad will amongst the public; as part of a publicity stunt, a documentary was shot claiming that Shyamalan's obsession with the supernatural came from early childhood traumas. This was all part of an elaborate ruse to get more people to go see the movie. It was seen through quite quickly and upset a number of media types at the time. Despite all this, *The Village* made $257M at the box office.

His luck and talent were put to the test in 2006 with *The Lady in The Water.* A strange urban fairy tale, it attempts to redefine and retell classic mythology tropes. Audiences were perplexed by the gullibility of the main characters and the utter lack of world building. The story has an uneven pace and mood, making it messy and painful to watch. To make matters worse, Shyamalan cast himself as a 'writer who changes the world'. Though he makes the odd cameo in most of his movies, he plays a major role in *The Lady in The Water* and this was seen by critics as quite arrogant. Though beautifully shot, the movie itself was a mess. It broke even at the box office, but made little profit and is seen by most as a vanity project.

Turning away from mythology, Shyamalan next turned his hand to *The Happening*, a story about the end of the world. Despite a rather heavy-handed environmental message and ultimately very silly premise, strong performances from Mark Wahlberg and Zooey Deschanel keep the feature afloat. The critics hated it, chiding the director for a lack of solid pacing and claiming that he had learned nothing from the disaster that was *The Lady in The Water.* Despite this, it did remarkably well at the box office, mostly due to Wahlberg and Deschanel's onscreen chemistry. Its twist ending (we'll not spoil it for you, even though you shouldn't waste your time) is so daft that it's since become a punchline to any joke involving Shyamalan. Worse was yet to come, however.

M. NIGHT SHYAMALAN ON SET OF THE VILLAGE (2004) WITH BRYCE DALLAS HOWARD





2010's *The Last Airbender* is arguably Shyamalan's greatest failure. In hindsight, it's easy to see why. The cartoon series *Avatar: the Last Airbender* took a full three seasons to tell a long and complex epic of war, magic, and contemplation. The series used arcs and long-form storytelling to convey a complex and detailed world. Despite being a fan of the show (his daughter introduced it to him), Shyamalan pulled out much of the show's warmth and humour in an attempt to make it appeal to a wider audience. He replaced this with special effects, which were visually interesting, but not enough to save it. Fans also disliked the casting, feeling that the actors looked nothing like the characters from the cartoon. It cost $150M to make, making it Shyamalan's most expensive feature. Despite being panned by the critics, it did make for a perfect summer movie to keep the kids quiet for a blessed 100 minutes or so. It did reasonably well at the box office, earning $320M, but it also burned a large amount of the public's patience for his work.

Taking a break from directing, Shyamalan would fare better as a writer and producer on *The Night Chronicles: Devil.* Here, he returns to his favourite themes: faith, miscommunication, and supernatural terror. It's an uncomplicated supernatural horror thriller in which the devil attempts to destroy a small group of people by turning them against each other. Tense, tight and quite short, it was well received and apparently sequels are planned. They are at the moment, in development hell, but it's likely that the devil will be back.

It took Will Smith to convince Shyamalan to return to directorial duties, though many of us wish he hadn't. Science fiction survival adventure flick *After Earth* was a disaster for a wide variety of reasons, though M. Night Shyamalan's involvement did not help matters. The premise is a solid bit of sci-fi; two people crash land on a long-abandoned Earth and have to deal with the hostile jungle it has become. The movie, produced by Will Smith's wife and co-starring Smith's son, was another vanity

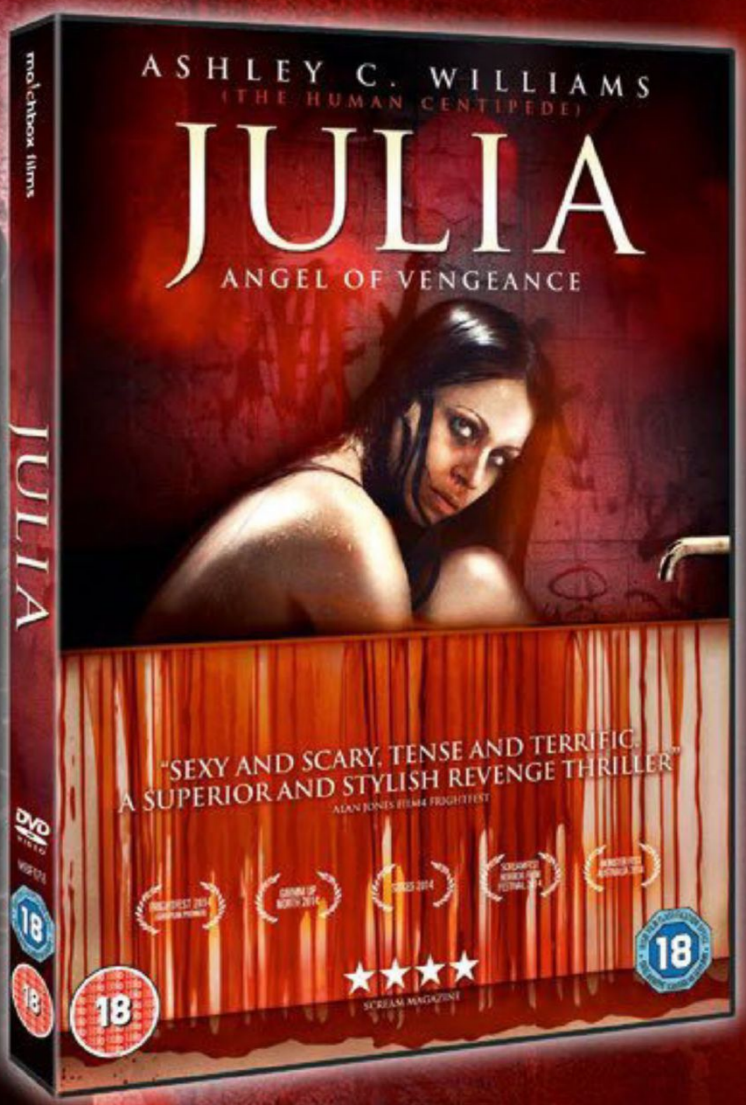
project, this time for Will Smith. The star value alone meant it did well at the box office, but critics and moviegoers yet again panned the movie, laughing at Jaden Smith's wooden performance and finding the whole affair rather silly. Interestingly, a series of spin-off novels based on the movie did quite well, garnering a small but dedicated fanbase. Muddled themes, bad acting and an overly preachy green message (that can be found amid the mess) drove off most of his fans at this point.

Despite these set-backs, Shyamalan continues to survive in the industry, surprising audiences with his versatility. His most recent project has been *Wayward Pines,* a TV series based on the Blake Crouch novels of the same name. Starring Matt Dillon as a U.S. Secret Service Agent trapped in a rural village, it has garnered favourable comparisons to telefantasy classic *The Prisoner* and is doing well with both viewers and critics.

Shyamalan, of course, has a new movie coming out very soon: *The Visit*. Shot on a small budget, you can read more about it on page 38. The director has recently announced that he prefers smaller budget movies, and it could well be that he has finally found his niche. Regardless, it seems that he is here to stay for a long time. How's that for a twist ending?

ASHLEY C. WILLIAMS
(THE HUMAN CENTIPEDE)

"A GRISLY AND STRIKING REVENGE THRILLER"
BLOODY DISGUSTING



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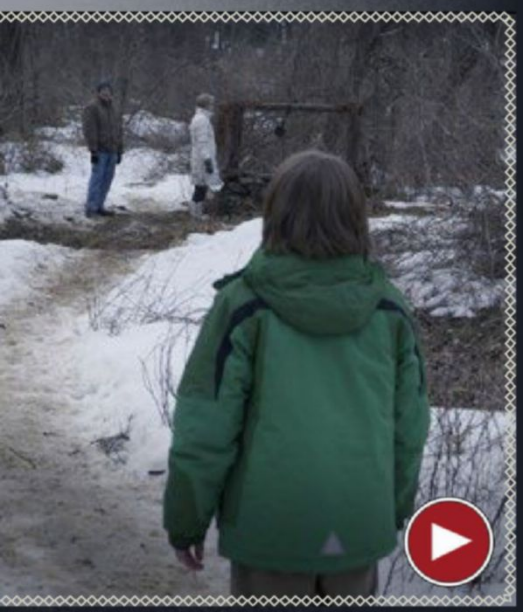
THERE'S NO ONE QUITE LIKE GRANDMA...

BY PAUL MOUNT

THE VISIT is the latest offering from the controversial M. Night Shyamalan, whose once-promising career hit the rocks in recent years with a run of disappointing and poorly-received movies. STARBURST looks at what we can expect from his new, super-low-budget 'found footage' horror movie...

"Would you mind getting inside the oven to clean it?"



Few modern filmmakers have enjoyed as turbulent a career as Indian-born writer/director M. Night Shyamalan. He followed his huge break-out hit *The Sixth Sense* (1999) with a reliable string of clever, intelligent - and above all, successful - fantasy thrillers (generally characterised, like *The Sixth Sense*, by their last-reel 'twist in the tale'). He came unstuck with the 2013 science fiction adventure *After Earth*; a rare flop for superstar Will Smith (although in reality it was a starring vehicle for Smith's son Jaden with Dad in a largely supporting role). Apparently undeterred by his falling creative stock, Shyamalan has regrouped, scaled things back and delivered a 'found footage'-style horror movie on a micro-budget of just $5 million. *The Visit* is already generating a reassuringly positive buzz following the release of a striking and intriguing trailer earlier this year.

The Visit is very much a welcome return to the small scale, intimate, creepy and unsettling tales that forged Shyamalan's reputation at the turn of the millennium. Two children (Olivia DeJonge, Ed Oxenbould) are left in the care of their grandparents (Deanna Dunagan, Peter McRobbie) at their Pennsylvanian family homestead while their mother is on vacation. But their carefree chocolate box holiday takes a turn for the sinister when they're warned not to come out of their bedrooms after 9.30pm. But, kids being kids, their curiosity gets the better of them and when they venture out after dark they discover that their grandparents aren't quite who (or what) they seem. When their mother refuses to cut short her holiday and take them home, they realise that they may have to fight for their lives against an unspeakable evil hiding in plain sight within their own family...

The Visit marks a significant creative turnabout for Shyamalan, who has already enjoyed renewed critical success this year as executive producer of Fox's successful summer 'event' mini-series

Wayward Pines (see this month's *TV Zone*, page 126). Gone are the marquee-pleasing star names such as Bruce Willis, Mel Gibson, and the former Fresh Prince; there's no-one in *The Visit* anyone outside their immediate families will ever have heard of. This allows critics and audiences alike to focus on Shyamalan's story unencumbered with the weight of the cast's back catalogue and, hopefully, the dark shadows of the director's less accomplished recent output.

The Visit is, in fact, the film that no-one really saw coming. Bankrolled by Shyamalan himself away from the glare of the Hollywood studios who had co-produced and released many of his previous movies, *The Visit* is credited to Shyamalan's own Blinding Edge Pictures; only when the film was completed did it come to the attention of producer Jason Blum (*Whiplash, Insidious, Paranormal Activity*), whose Blumhouse Productions model specialises in low-budget genre movies. Blum had been keen to work with Shyamalan for some time but the director, accustomed to working on films with considerably bigger budgets than most of Blum's credits, wasn't initially interested. But after completing a rough cut of his own low-budget movie, Shyamalan contacted Blum – an expert in the field – for his opinion. Blum admits to being blown away by the film which, perhaps surprisingly, is being dubbed in many circles a 'comedy horror' movie. "There was a lot of humour in *Paranormal Activity 3* and *Insidious* and there's humour in *The Visit*. It relaxes you and disarms you," said Blum at last month's San Diego Comic-Con. Shyamalan explained his approach to the film's comic content. Initially, he said, the tone of the film is "comedy scare, comedy scare. Then the laughing and the screaming get close together until there's a 180 [degree turn] and you're laughing and screaming at the same time."

Shyamalan fans (and we're assuming there are still some left) will recall that the director has danced with humour in his movies before. His understated 'alien invasion' thriller *Signs* is often cited for its occasionally quirky comedy content, but *The Visit*, with its key themes of elderly people behaving extraordinarily out of character (to say the least) creates its own distinctive comedy beats. "The challenge of the movie was striking that perfect balance between humour and horror," he said. "This one took me a *long* time to edit. The very first cut that I put together was like a full-on art house film. Then I went comedy; like it had all of these comedic tones, then I was like, 'You know what? Let's anchor this as a thriller.' Once I came to the conclusion that the predominant spine of the movie was indeed a scary thriller that becomes a horror film, then I knew which of the other things - the artsy things, the humorous things - could stay in service of the movie."

Blum is especially keen to emphasise that the film is a thriller first and foremost rather than a comedy horror movie. "That's a very specific tone to strike and it's virtually impossible to sell in the market," he said at Comic-Con. "I think having humour in a scary movie is important, but you can't keep someone at the edge of your seat. It's hard to do well."

The film clearly works against recent genre trends, eschewing larger-than-life demons and supernatural creatures. Instead, it focuses on two children terrified of their elders – their own grandparents – and perhaps in some ways plays on childhood fears of family members who seem impossibly decrepit and ancient to the very young. "For me, this fear of old people is an extension of our fear of death," said Shyamalan. "When our mind and body deteriorate, that's scary. We find it funny/scary, which we play with in the movie."

What can we realistically expect from *The Visit*? What we've seen suggests a film which plays in the 'found footage' sandbox as the two kids settle into an idyllic week's holiday with their genial

grandparents before it takes a turn into the dark and eerie as the kids creep out of their bedroom just before 11pm and find their grandma – apparently naked – clawing and scratching at the walls like a wild animal. Things go from bad to worse as both grandparents start behaving increasingly strangely - "they're weird during the day and even weirder at night" – and they tell their sceptical mother that "there's something wrong with Nana and Pop-Pop." The tension and excitement ramp up as the grandparents' terrible secrets are revealed and a family fairytale holiday turns into a terrifying nightmare.

Will *The Visit* see Night fall yet again, or could the film herald a new dawn of popularity and acclaim for one of Hollywood's most individual and yet frustratingly unpredictable and erratic latter-day auteurs? Let's hope that seeing Shyamalan's latest effort won't be another visit to the cinema we'll have cause to regret...

THE VISIT hopes to enjoy a lengthy stay in cinemas on September 11th.

It's a Kind of MAGIC

STARBURST looks at LUCASFILM's upcoming animated fantasy, STRANGE MAGIC...

BY JACK BOTTOMLEY

Magic can be found in the strangest of places; be it in an old crystal, an unassuming looking lamp, or the long locks of a tower-dwelling princess. Over the years, cinema has found magic in many places and of them all, it is perhaps the films of Disney that have left the biggest magical mark on most viewers. Be it the Fairy Godmother Bibbidi-Bobbidi-Booing in *Cinderella* or Maleficent unleashing the dark powers of hell in *Sleeping Beauty*, magic has been a recurring element in some of Disney's most - and least - lingering motion pictures. No more so than in the case of their animated output. Which brings us to the (literally) all-singing-all-dancing animated musical adventure *Strange Magic*, a story with fairies, imps, various bog land creatures and some sparkling musical numbers... from a story by a little bearded fellow called George Lucas!

Inspired by William Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (had it starred even more forest-dwelling creatures), backed by Lucasfilm Ltd, Lucasfilm Animation, Industrial Light & Magic, and distributed by Disney, the story of *Strange Magic* is one filled with intrigue, popular music, sentiment and a little touch of sadness. The film is far from a youngling; in fact, Lucas has been toying with this story for over 15 years, developing the idea alongside releasing his *Star Wars* prequels. *Strange Magic* at its very core was intended as a film for Lucas' three daughters Amanda, Katie and Everest. In an interview, Lucas said, "*Just like Star Wars was designed for 12-year-old boys, Strange Magic was designed for 12-year-old girls*". This was far from the only motivating factor for the film, however.

In addition to drawing inspiration from the bard's lingering romantic comedy tale (and some of his other stories too), the film's director (and seven-time Oscar winner) Gary Rydstrom has cited Jim Henson's *Labyrinth* and Lucas' *American Graffiti* as a big influence on the structure of the story, as well as fairytales *Beauty and the Beast* and *The Ugly Duckling*. Indeed, the director himself once compared the story to 'Beauty and the Beast had the Beast not changed' and it's not hard to see the presence of the aforementioned films and tales in this bizarre-looking offering.

The story sees a realm divided, as the fairies live in the light and the Goblin-like Bog creatures live in the dark forests, with the border between these two realms marked by primrose flowers (the petals of which are vital in making love potions - hint hint). Fairy Princess Marianne (Evan Rachel Wood), after a heartbreaking betrayal by warrior Roland (Sam Palladio), vows never to love again but cannot escape the feeling due to her love-struck sister Dawn (Meredith Ann Bull) constantly going on about which boy she will meet at the upcoming Spring Ball. However, nobody loves Dawn more than her best friend Sunny (Elijah Kelley) and when he acquires a primrose petal, he is encouraged to venture into the dark forest to find the Sugar Plum Fairy (Kristen Chenoweth) - who has been imprisoned by the Bog King (Alan Cumming) - who can create love potions and could hold the key to Sunny realising his dreams.

Needless to say, all does not go to plan and Marianne must get involved when the Bog King retaliates, kidnapping Dawn and demanding back the love potion.

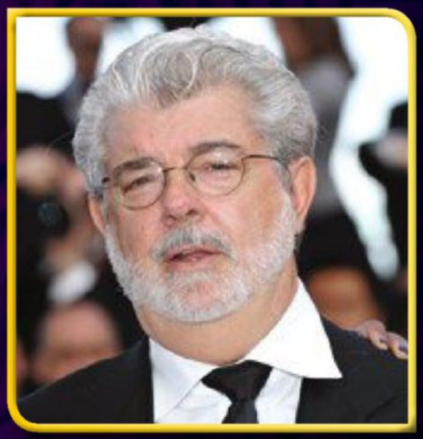
As you can see, love is very much the order of the day in *Strange Magic* and Lucas has stated, "*Love is on the inside, it's somebody you have common ground with. It's someone you share the same values with, common interests. You share the things that will last you the rest of your lives, and what the person looks like will not*." Okay, so it all seems a little bit gooey-eyed and oh-so-lovely but where *Strange Magic* is potentially different is in its… well… strange visuals. Whereas many stories like this feature fresh-faced Princes, big-eyed princesses and pink castles, *Strange Magic* promises a bit more of a unique visual approach. True, some of the main characters are human-esque, but characters like the Bog King, his mother Griselda (Maya Rudolph), the imp (Brenda Chapman) and Thang (Peter Stormare - who chomped on a pack of gum while voicing the character) are far from Mr/Ms. World winners. Visually, *Strange Magic* evokes a *Rango*-like vibe but after all the 'don't judge a book by its cover' ideology, it is no surprise to see a stranger aesthetic to this tale.

Visuals, however, are not the whole story, as this is a musical animated fantasy, so the film is naturally chock full of musical numbers, most of which are covers of hit songs throughout the years. The music for the film took 5 years to assemble, with Lucas getting heavily involved alongside music supervisor Steven Gizicki.
Both chose from a plethora of tracks, narrowing the field down to the varied line-up that makes up the film's final (and quite eccentric) soundtrack. From Elvis Presley's 'Can't Help Falling in Love' to The Trogg's 'Wild Thing', this is a film that very much makes music central to its message. In every way, the construction to *Strange Magic* seems passionate and odd in equal measure, so where does the sadness come in?

Well, let's not beat around the primrose, we have to address the elephant in the room (or in this case would that be the troll under the bridge?), in that *Strange Magic* has already been released stateside. And the results have been far from magical, with the film bombing hard with a mere $12.4 million total taking, with one of the worst ever openings (a miniscule $5.5 million) for a film playing in over 3,000 theatres. Sadly, reviews have not been much better with a terrible score of only 18% on Rotten Tomatoes, with most citing the lack of wonder to the story. This being said though, it was always going to be a hard sell with a film like this, which seems to boast a lot of elements that could puzzle or repel a mainstream audience (especially as some of these elements have already been done successfully by *Shrek*). Still, looking on the bright side, we must remember that not all good things flourish instantly, over time some box office bombs can go on to become cult films and some panned pictures can be re-assessed down the line as misunderstood classics.

Will *Strange Magic* become a modern day cult fantasy, comparable to the likes of *Willow* or *Labyrinth* down the line? It may seem unlikely at the moment, but if *Howard the Duck* and *Plan 9 from Outer Space* can go on to attain cult stardom anything is possible. Plus it is a nice change of pace to see a romantic story not obsessed with haranguing an audience with lovely characters, lovely faces and shunning ugliness (*Shrek* aside are there really that many that don't do this?). After all, magic is found in the strangest of places and who is to say that this little animated effort is not a diamond in the rough. This is a project that has evolved over a long duration and which Lucas has been personally invested. Hell, The Fairy King (played by Alfred Molina) is even modelled partially on Lucas himself. It could go either way, but having read all this, even the harshest among you surely can't help but give a chance to a film that has a Goblin covering Deep Purple? Come on, admit it, you are curious about this strange magic.

STRANGE MAGIC is released in UK Cinemas from August 21st.



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KEEP ON RUNNIN'

by John Townsend

However a-MAZE-ing it may seem, the YA adaptations keep on coming, so we prepare to meet the intrepid bunch of RUNNERs once more in THE SCORCH TRIALS...

Percy Jackson is dead. Well, cinematically speaking anyway. Another episode in the demi-God film series would seem to be as unlikely as Zeus himself appearing on Earth to provide funding with sacks full of Olympian gold. At least poor old Percy managed two films before trundling off the (im)mortal plane. *Beautiful Creatures* and *The Mortal Instruments* all fared so disappointingly at the box office that they barely clawed back their relative budgets, meaning already planned sequels were shelved, probably never to be heard of again. As the young adult film graveyard grows more and more congested, only two genuine contenders remain to draw on the momentum of *The Hunger Games* 2015 victory lap. Who will rise to establish themselves as the new champion of young adult fiction films? In one corner, there is *The Divergent Series*, and with the second instalment *Insurgent* already released and closing in on a similar performance at the box office as its predecessor, it could be argued the Shailene Woodley-led version of a dystopian future has delivered an early punch (last of the boxing metaphors, promise). That said, *The Maze Runner* was, in many respects, one of the surprise hits of 2014, and if that success can be repeated, the next instalment has a real chance of delivering the knockout blow (sorry!).

Perhaps one of the reasons for the success of *The Maze Runner* was in the predominantly male cast. Young Adult (YA) fiction tends to be dominated by female characters; young women who feel alienated from the social mainstream such as Bella Swan and Katniss Everdeen. Here the main protagonist is a young man named Thomas who reluctantly leads a decreasing band of

survivors out of the maze. There is only one female character of note who doesn't appear until the final third of the film, although she does arrive bearing exposition and is key to the development of the plot. Given the abundance of YA film adaptations, it's easy to understand a public's growing lethargy with the amount of brooding young women and a more male-oriented cast offered a welcome change. When that cast also includes famous actors of the calibre of Will Poulter and Thomas Brodie-Sangster, as well as emerging star Dylan O'Brien as the headstrong Thomas, there was also no lacking in the talent department. All things considered, *The Maze Runner* was an impressive, well-made film that delivered decent thrills resulting in a successful run at the box office, but it was definitely one that left many questions unanswered.

So will the next film in the franchise, *Maze Runner: The Scorch Trials*, provide a few of those answers?

The idea that a movie spends a good portion of its final act (and sometimes more) setting up a sequel is a divisive one. It's easy to argue that the filmmakers should spend a little more time and give a little more thought to the picture they are making rather than pandering to Hollywood's risky obsession with franchises; *The Golden Compass*, anyone? That said, if the film is from a noted literary series, one that can draw on a ready-made audience, then adhering to the narrative arcs of the source material is essential to satisfy that often highly passionate fanbase. A quandary perhaps? Maybe, but with *The Maze Runner*, the filmmakers really had little choice as the ending of the first book is so openly vague and questions much of what you've just seen. While an escape by a 'select' few would appear to be successful, the suggestion that everything that happened was all part of a masterplan is evident. Taking that into account, then, can anything in *Scorch Trials* be taken as it seems?

One thing that does appear clear is that the second film in the series will be very different to the first, although will hopefully retain much of what worked well. *The Maze Runner* had an energy that is often missing in similarly themed films, and certainly in the often very introspective and thoughtful YA adaptations. This was a film that wasn't afraid of its simple premise, embracing it with a wanton enthusiasm that carried the narrative forward with a sense of urgency. *The Scorch Trials* book contains much more complexity of the plot so more exposition may be required, but it will still need to harness some of the same exuberance to keep things moving and interest levels high. The main difference will be in the setting. Where *The Maze Runner* was initially limited by the very concept itself, keeping the group trapped in a square of greenery called The Glade, in theory, *Scorch Trials* has no such restrictions. Releasing the group, and apparently other test groups as well, into a wider dystopian world would appear to offer endless possibilities and a sandbox element to the narrative, although this could once again be tempered by a balance of what is real and what is a construct of the mysterious company known as WCKD.

Where *Scorch Trials* does differ from other YA sequels is in its reluctance to throw big name casting at the production to garner a box office boost. While *The Hunger Games*, perhaps unnecessarily, added serious weight with Julianne Moore and *The Divergent Series* recruited Naomi Watts, *Scorch Trials* has resisted such high-profile additions. The only one of note is Aidan Gillen, presumably as 'Mr. Bad Guy' and who, while eminently watchable, doesn't guarantee a return against his fee. The fee itself is probably the significant bit as, while the budget will no doubt have increased given the success of the first film, ensuring a relatively low financial outlay clearly provides greater security for an ongoing franchise. With further films planned and prequel novels released, this could include up to five films in the future.

Perhaps the greatest challenge facing *Scorch Trials* will not be its rivals for *The Hunger Games* crown, but in overcoming a public's understandable fatigue with the YA obsession with renaming every damn thing. Gladers, The Changing, The Scorch and The Flare are already out there, but no doubt many more fancy names for the obvious will emerge in the second film and as each one comes with its own little piece of exposition, this could be an area in which *Scorch Trials* suffers. Even now, if anyone can fully explain the reasons behind the different social groups of *Divergent* clearly and concisely, they are worthy of a lifetime's respect! At least *The Maze Runner* is a little simpler to understand (so far) and for that should be applauded, but to YA writers and filmmakers everywhere, please spare us more of the futuristic terminology.

If *Harry Potter* taught filmmakers anything when it comes to YA, it is that you must continue to improve and build upon the previous release. The final film in the series, *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows: Part 2* remains not only the biggest film of the franchise, but also one of the most successful of all time with a worldwide return of more than $1.3 billion. With *The Hunger Games: Mockingjay - Part 2* set to be the biggest film in Katniss' story, there is pressure on the remaining contenders to raise their game, so to speak. *Insurgent* has almost matched the return of *Divergent*, albeit with a greater budget and amidst lukewarm reviews, so it will be interesting to see how *Scorch Trials* fares. Added pressure comes from the number of other YA properties that are in development, but there is one statistic that is perhaps more significant. Statistics (and who doesn't love statistics?) show that around 55% of YA readers are adults. With that in mind, is it not reasonable to assume that a similar number, if not a greater one, form the crux of the film adaptation's audiences? Therefore *Scorch Trials*, with its feet firmly planted in the action genre, offers something a little different for filmgoers weary of tangled teen romance and repressed angst. This is an age-old story of survival against the odds without a hormonal flush or a celibacy message in sight. For that, it should be applauded and be enjoyed as the simple yet thrilling ride it promises to be.

As Katniss relinquishes her crown, it would seem that The Runners may well be best placed to pick it up.

You can dash to see MAZE RUNNER: THE SCORCH TRIALS when it opens in UK Cinemas on September 11th.

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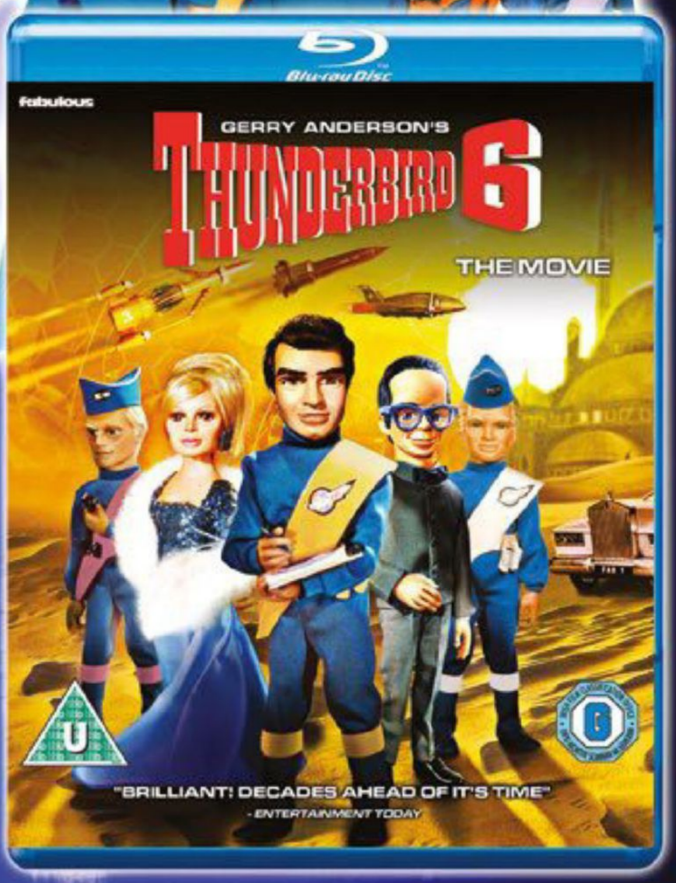

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HAWK LIVES!

"The slayer returns...the hunt begins..."

Words: Paul Mount

A famous cult film from the eighties, HAWK THE SLAYER has constantly gained new fans each year. Original co-writer and director TERRY MARCEL last month announced a deal with leading games developer/ publisher REBELLION to bring a sequel, HAWK THE HUNTER, to the screens. STARBURST met up with him to find out the history of Hawk... and his future...

STARBURST: It's been thirty-five years since *Hawk the Slayer* first appeared in the UK. What's the story behind the long wait for the sequel?
Terry Marcel: What happened with *Hawk* was that it was released in the UK where it did extremely well. Then [co-writer] Harry Robertson and I went to the US where it was going to be released. We were in the US for about a week and then ITC, our distributors, went bust. So it never got released in the US and it disappeared. But interestingly enough, as we've recently discovered, it's not stopped selling worldwide all this time. We had a list from ITC and I couldn't believe it because every country in the world still buys this film. Harry and I wrote a sequel which I've reworked since and we were thinking 'How can we get this sequel made?' We've been looking around for people to get involved and we did a deal with Baltic Films in Lithuania – I worked there for two years on *The New Adventures of Robin Hood* and got on very well with them – so they came on board because there's a nice tax deal there. We were nowhere near getting the money we needed so we said 'Let's go for a Kickstarter and see if we can raise some money.' In the interim, Rebellion had contacted me and said that they were very keen to get involved – subject to the Kickstarter working out – and they have been very generous with what they've given us in terms of their investment, so as it stands at the moment we've got all the pieces in place if the Kickstarter works.

Rick Wakeman with Terry Marcel.

How would you anticipate the project moving forward in the immediate future?
The Kickstarter launches in August after a screening of the original film and a Q&A at FrightFest. If we get the money – we need to raise 20% of our £5 million budget – we would start preparation immediately in October. We would shoot in Lithuania in November and based on what the response is to that we would then go into a TV series.

Spoiler time! Tell us everything about Hawk the Hunter...
I'll give you some little hints! It's a direct sequel to *Hawk the Slayer* in that Voltan returns and this time he's after the Dark Sword which was made before the Mind Sword. The Dark Sword is evil and has been hidden away by a troll. If Voltan gets his hands on it, we're in deep trouble, so there's a race to find the Dark Sword. We also see the development of Hawk beginning to understand the power of the Mind Sword. We've just put up a prologue on YouTube which gives away a little bit about the stones. There were three stones and one of them ends up with the wizards, who are in fact elves and one ends up in the Sword – the other one I can't disclose! They were discovered by a rock-finding troll who's digging away in a tiny tunnel. He breaks through into this gigantic cavern where he finds this skyscraper-sized crystal buried in the ground. Around the crystal are three shining stones, the Three Sisters. He grabs them and runs but as he does so the giant crystal bursts into life and that's when magic is born in the land. It's all to do with crystal magic and in the sequel we begin to see how it all works, why it works and I had to reinvent everything to give a reason for the Mindstone.

How does the sequel feed into the proposed TV series and how advanced are you in planning for the series should it happen?
It's very much the sequel to the original film and it's really the beginning of the saga, moving it in a totally new direction. The series arc is all about trying to find the final stone and what happens when we get all three together. Planning it all required a lot of work and it took me about six or seven months to actually create the whole arc, but I think that's what Rebellion like about it. Their plan is to release a game, books and comic books and we're in talks about releasing a soundtrack album. It'll be a long haul, five

years of the series I hope. Whereas a lot of series don't know where they're heading, I've already done the ending – which is going to be locked up in secret with the Coca Cola formula! TV is the big market today and we're constantly keeping our eye on the ball and the only thing like us coming along is The Shannara Chronicles series for MTV which is a big (ten-episode) 'event' series. That'll be big and we can't compete with that. But I'm aiming for a family 8pm slot for Hawk, and I believe that a good sword-and-sorcery series can fit that slot.

Can we rewind a bit and discuss how Hawk the Slayer came about in the first place?
I'd always been a sword-and-sorcery fan – I loved Fritz Leiber and Robert E. Howard, and I particularly loved *Solomon Kane* which, incidentally, I thought was a great movie. I was working on turning two Ray Cooney plays into films and my writing partner Harry was doing the music for them. We got chatting one day and both said that we loved sword-and-sorcery and I said 'Funnily enough, I'm working on an idea at the moment' and I told him that I wanted to do something about a medieval warrior set in the fourteenth century much in the way that *A Fistful of Dollars* was a virtual remake of Kurosawa's *Yojimbo*. I was taking a two-week break in Spain, so while I was there I knocked out a seventy-page draft and came back and sat down with Harry and together we finished off the script.

Obviously visual effects have moved on a bit since 1980. Will your new *Hawk* be able to rise to the heightened expectations of a modern audience?
Well actually, the fans always say the same thing – 'don't change it, make it exactly as it was' – but of course, these days we've got to do the CGI. When we wrote the sequel back then, we put things in which nobody could have conceived of ever being able to do, but we still put them in. We had changelings and creatures which in our mind's eye we never thought anyone would be able to do, but of course today it's simple. If we'd attempted these creatures back then, they'd probably have been stop-motion, but now we'll be able to do it properly. We actually homage the great stop-motion master Ray Harryhausen in a sequence where there's this indestructible army of bonemen. Ray was the grandfather of us all, so if anyone says 'you nicked that from Ray Harryhausen' then I'll just say 'Yes we did, we nicked from the master – and why not?' There's another sequence at the beginning where Hawk, Crow and Gort are attacked by flesh-eating creatures. I was going to use stuntmen, but Rebellion said 'we'll do these' and they've shown me the CGI creatures and I've been licking my lips so we're already getting far more than we could ever have got doing it with stop-motion or stuntmen!

Do you think initiatives like Kickstarter are the way forward for low-budget movies?
Crowd-funding is a superb way of going if you can raise the money. It gives filmmakers a fabulous opportunity to get films out there, and then it just depends on whether the public like them or not. This has been hard work, but I think Kickstarter is fantastic. We won't stop; if Kickstarter fails, we'll have to look elsewhere and find some other generous person out there. It might end up as a musical on ice!

The Kickstarter campaign for HAWK THE HUNTER will be launched on August 30th following a screening of HAWK THE SLAYER at Film 4 FrightFest in London.

KEITH CLAXTON

The director tasked with bringing HAWK THE SLAYER back to the screen after a thirty-five year absence opens up...

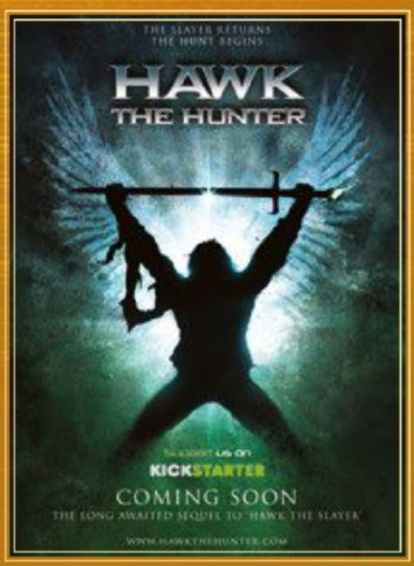
STARBURST: How did you find yourself working with Terry Marcel?
Keith Claxton: Terry had this cracking little sword-and-sorcery show called *Dark Knight* which filmed in New Zealand. I'd been doing a lot of scriptwriting until that point, and I branched over into directing. Terry and I got together, I wrote a couple of scripts for the series and then on the back of my showreel Terry said 'I'm going to give you a break and send you over to New Zealand to see how you go and I'm going to be watching you like a hawk' – which was slightly unnerving! It all went fantastically well, I felt like a fish in water and I knew that directing wasn't something that was going to phase me. In the end, I stayed there for months and ended up doing the epic series finale. We had some great times on that, great fun and it was doing well for Channel 5 – as it was then – but then Kevin Lygo came along and it was a case of 'new commissioner, out with the old' and even though the ratings weren't phenomenal, the audience percentages were great - but that's television; if they want to get rid of you, they'll get rid of you!

Did you establish an immediate rapport with Terry?
Terry and I go back over ten years and we hit it off because we share a love of science fiction, fantasy, Ray Harryhausen. He was one of the only people I've ever come across who knew immediately what I was talking about when I said 'Have you ever read any of Fritz Leiber's *Fafhrd and the Gray Mouser*, so I knew I was on solid ground!

Why do you think the world of HAWK THE SLAYER is so appealing to audiences?
Hawk is so brilliant because it's nostalgia; it's revisiting those early wonderful days of sword-and-sorcery where it was very much uncharted territory. Everybody's done it since – *Kull the Conqueror, Ladyhawke*, even *Flash Gordon* was a bit of a science fiction/sword-and-sorcery mash-up.

How involved have you been in realising Terry's vision for the sequel?
Ever since we discussed the idea, I've been riffing with Terry. But this is very much his project and I feel like I have a responsibility as the custodian of this wonderful world. But I get to take his world and play in it! He's done all the hard work in many respects in terms of imagining it, building up the whole backstory which supports the structure of the storytelling which just sits there. But it's all there and I get to run around in this universe! It's just a wonderful opportunity.

What can you tell us about the look you'll give the new film from a directing perspective?
It's early days yet, so I don't want to commit one way or the other. I always reserve the right to completely change my mind and decide to do things completely differently!



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We are LEGEND

By Samantha Ward

The true-life story of Britain's most notorious gangsters gets another big-screen adaptation, as the man of the moment TOM HARDY steps into both roles as THE KRAY TWINS. With plenty of cult potential, we see what this version has to offer…

Having won a Best Adapted Screenplay Academy Award for ***L. A. Confidential*** (1997) and being nominated for ***Mystic River*** (2003), Brian Helgeland has proven his ability as an exceptional screenwriter. Helgeland has also written the screenplays for ***A Nightmare on Elm Street 4: The Dream Master*** (1988), Tony Scott's ***Man on Fire*** (2004) and Ridley Scott's ***Robin Hood*** (2010) among many others. Writing was not enough for Helgeland, who started directing in 1996 with an episode of ***Tales from the Crypt***, then going on to helm his first feature ***Payback*** (1999) starring Mel Gibson. Interestingly, the director's cut was almost entirely different to the original. With ***A Knight's Tale***, ***The Order*** and ***43*** also under his belt, ***Legend*** will be Helgeland's sixth feature film as writer and director. Hopefully, with all his previous experiences and skills, he will bring us something gritty and worthy of a good old British gangster flick.

Legend is based on the true story of the notorious duo Reginald and Ronald Kray, aka Reggie and Ronnie. It's a rise and fall story set in London during the 1950s and 1960s, the heyday of the Kray twins, as Helgeland sees us through various points during the peak of their criminal careers.

Tom Hardy has taken on a double performance portraying both of the Kray twins, a role it seems he has pulled off with brilliant versatility. Portraying the distinct difference between both characters has a lot to do with Hardy's performance. With speech and mannerisms changing between the characters with such natural ease, you can appreciate his entire commitment to both roles. Also, a lot has to be said for the makeup department who have done an excellent job in creating prominent differences to Hardy's physical features to set the twins apart. Whilst Reggie seems to have kept his pretty boy features, Ronnie's broken nose and thick-set jaw are most noticeable and only add to his boorish behaviour.

Among a great cast is Welsh actor Taron Egerton (***Kingsman: The Secret Service***) a loose and loony member of 'The Firm', Paul Bettany (***Avengers: Age of Ultron***) playing Charlie Richardson, the head of a sadistic rival gang, and Christopher Eccleston as Detective Superintendent Leonard "Nipper" Read, who leads a squadron in an attempt to bring the Krays to justice. The film also stars gangster connoisseur Chazz Palminteri (***The Usual Suspects***) and Australian actress Emily Browning (***Sucker Punch***)

who portrays Frances Shea, a love interest of Reggie's who soon causes friction between the twins.

The forefront of organised crime in the East End, Reggie and Ronnie practically owned London with influences in high places and a heinous reputation - in other words, their cocky cockney charm and their fists. From boxers to criminals, the twins led a gang known as 'The Firm' who were involved in armed robberies, arson, assaults and murder. In order to cover up their lucrative criminal activities, the twins ran West End night clubs, mixing with Hollywood stars from Judy Garland to Frank Sinatra, often having photos taken with entertainers and politicians, which turned them into celebrities in their own right.

As close as the brothers were they both had huge differences in personality and mentality. Reggie was in the criminal business mostly out of need to provide for his family, whereas Ronnie was in it for pure joy and mayhem. There is no doubt that the Krays led a ridiculously dangerous and ludicrous lifestyle, which has caused al sorts of conspiracies to run rampant. There have also been the twin's own revelations in interviews and books; Ronnie's book *My Story* confesses his bisexuality and Reggie opens up with his book *Born Fighter* about being one half of a criminal double act.

As well as books and countless documentaries, there's already been one feature length film in 1990, *The Krays*, written by Philip Ridley and directed by Peter Medak. In this movie, the twins were portrayed by Spandau Ballet brothers Gary and Martin Kemp. Though not twins, the Kemp brothers looked very much alike with enough distinct features to set them apart, much like the real twins. Ironically, Gary - the eldest Kemp - played younger twin Ronnie, who is more unpredictable, whilst Martin played it more straight as Reggie. *The Krays* begins during the 1930's London, following the twins growing up in the East End with their doting mother. Soon enough, they go from mother-coddled ruffians to influential gangsters in their adult life; thugs with a mother complex. It's a slightly sinister, gritty drama with classic British humour, tragedy and hooliganism. Much difference can be seen between Medak's slower-paced drama and Helgeland's glossy *Legend* with quick cuts garnished with whimsicality. Helgeland's knack for writing great repartee is notable and seems to fit perfectly in this sheeny style of the swinging '60s, revitalising their story and giving it extra energy. Despite these differences, however, it seems that the theme of family relations and tragedy is still very much in the forefront, just as it is in *The Krays*.

Besides the style, for his own telling Helgeland has taken a prominent section of the twin's lives and centres his film on the relationship between the two brothers. He's created a lot of tension between them, focusing mostly on Reggie, the elder by 10 minutes and the more cunning, put-together of the two. Though in no way considered soft, Reggie is certainly the calmer of the two as he has to grapple with Ronnie's unhinged and violent behaviour, while he tries to run their underground business. Ronnie is definitely more of a wild card; we see that Reggie has a tolerance for his absurd behaviour on the pure basis that he's blood and family, but it seems Ronnie may take his crazy antics over the edge. Controversies will be raised, and the Twins will find themselves in a confrontation with each on more than one occasion. It looks nothing short of a glittery glamourised criminal lifestyle, but after all, that is indeed the life the twins used to lead. The title seems to say it all about the film and the Kray twins, the most infamous underworld thugs in London living it large with a manner of charm and finesse, 'living like a legend'. A mixture of violence, wit and skewed family values, *Legend* looks to be a promising and exciting addition to the gangster genre.

LEGEND opens in UK cinemas on September 9th.

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Crème de la Crime

By Dominic Cuthbert

With the imminent release of LEGEND, based on the real-life gangsters THE KRAYS, we take a look at their cinematic counterparts; the hard men who rule the underworld of CULT MOVIES…

The allure of organised crime, of illegal opulence and urban bloody empires, continues to fascinate filmmakers devoting entire careers to gangsters, TV execs green-lighting gritty crime shows and, most tellingly, the audience always after more. From the long shadows and cigarette smoke of film noir, up to the new Krays outing *Legend*, there's a glut of mob bosses rising and falling, and fitting in some delinquency in the interim.

The first image that rightly springs to mind is the stuffed jowls of Marlon Brando and his gurning Italian-American lingo as Don Vito Corleone.

He might not have clocked that much screen time in Francis Ford Coppola's terrific crime opus *The Godfather*, but he left a distinctive impression. Vito was allegedly inspired by real life mobster Frank Costello, who played a pivotal role in uniting the disparate Italian and Sicilian gangs into five separate crime families. The story charts a tumultuous ten-year period of the family under the Don's waning gaze, before a heart attack lays him to rest. His youngest son, Michael (Al Pacino), goes from bright young thing to hardened crime boss, routinely topping viewer polls as the greatest crime lord. He never quite eclipses his old man though. Both delivered seminal performances, and proved to be the yard stick by which every mob boss that followed was measured. Their pop culture apotheosis was embodied by one Marion Anthony D'Amico, A.K.A. Fat Tony. While *The Simpsons*' resident mob boss was a composite of fictional and real life gangsters, he was largely in the vein of Brando's Vito, and, in more recent seasons, Tony Soprano.

David Lynch, ever the provocateur, shunned convention and cliché in constructing his own iconic crime boss in *Blue Velvet*, Frank Booth. Inspired by watching a debonair man walk into a diner while Lynch watched over his milkshake, Frank was the embodiment of the dark evil heart lurking under the façade of Americana. Lynch is only partly responsible for the lasting nastiness of the character. The permanency was in the casting, and Lynch thought Dennis Hopper was perfect. The casting team, however, weren't on board, offering the role instead to Harry Dean Stanton. Only two months out of rehab, Hopper called Lynch and infamously confessed, *"I have to play Frank Booth, because I* ***am*** *Frank Booth"*. Hopper is skin-crawling, seeming to relish the role, plunging himself into that initial thunderous scene opposite Isabella Rossellini. From the first haunting huff of that mask, the image has stuck in the psyche of every cinemagoer thereafter. Time has done nothing to dull Hopper's performance of a man who pukes when he drinks warm beer, weeps on hearing Roy Orbison croon 'In Dreams', and acts out his psychosexual, incestuous power fantasy. For an altogether more sophisticated, though no less chilling, crime lord, Mr Rudolph in Lynch's adaption of Barry Gifford's *Wild at Heart* is a great counterpoint to Frank's deranged misdeeds.

Like Lynch, Quentin Tarantino is fascinated by America's seedy underbelly, and is no stranger to the crime lord. His debut effort, *Reservoir Dogs*, boasted Joe Cabot as portrayed by Lawrence Tierney (who had played notorious gangster John Dillinger in the eponymous 1945 biopic). Tierney might have convinced the viewer he was bad to the bone with money to match, but it was hardly a memorable performance. *Pulp Fiction*'s Marcellus

For arguably the most extravagant crime boss, we have to turn to the soppy Gothic melodrama of *The Crow*. The film made a household name out of its late leading man Brandon Lee, but Michael Wincott was captivating as Top Dollar, the gravel-voiced criminal king of Detroit. He cut a well-tailored and striking figure, with his expensive suits and long flowing locks, complete with his half-sister/lover, insatiable coke habit and a preoccupation with peepers. It's October 30th, Devil's Night, that stirs his delinquent sense of fun with the annual arson attacks. James O'Barr's 1989 graphic novel was a disturbing story of love, torment, revenge, and redemption, but the campy screen adaptation all but ironed out the essence. Still, Wincott looks to be having the time of his life with his shark-like grin and effortless delivery, making every sentence a punchline.

Wallace, however, tends to stick in the memory. Introduced to the audience by only the back of his head (complete with Band-Aid) opposite Bruce Willis' Butch, actor Ving Rhames is able to command the screen with his bassy tones and weighty presence, giving the viewer all they need to know about the mysterious character. After Butch later frees him from redneck rapists, Rhames is a picture of calm, brandishing a sawn-off shotgun and looking down at his squirming prey. His measured delivery of the line "*I'ma get medieval on your ass*" makes him one of the more formidable and urbane examples. More memorable still is O-Ren Ishii, as played by Lucy Liu in the first instalment of Tarantino's fanboy homage, *Kill Bill*. From one fourth of the Deadly Viper Assassination Squad, Ishii rose to the head of the Yakuza and was dubbed the queen of the Tokyo underground, unheard of for someone of her gender and Chinese-American heritage. A drawn out and tenuous anime-esque sequence might chart her childhood vengeance quest, but it's Liu who brings grace, gravitas and an icy class to the role. Her fight in the garden of a Japanese restaurant is tremendously orchestrated, with the snowfall and samurai blades clashing, channelling Akira Kurosawa. The character left a deep impression, deeper even than the one the Bride left in her skull.

David Cronenberg's early works might be principal body horror titles, but his later efforts are hard-edged, psychological and often crime orientated. *A History of Violence* wove a tale of a former mobster living an unassuming life as the owner of a local diner, until a robbery forces an act of violence, making him a local hero. His crime boss brother soon catches wind and reels him in. Viggo Mortensen delivers a spellbinding performance, straddling the mild-mannered Tom Stall and the unhinged Joey Cusack, but it's William Hurt as his brother Richie that earns a place on our list. His divorced cruelty and nonchalance in the face of ultra-violence and death is unnerving, hugging his estranged sibling before ordering a garrotting. Cronenberg followed this with *Eastern Promises*, an unflinching look at a Russian mob family living in London. Armin Mueller-Stahl inspires empathy and a cunning believability as mob boss Semyon, but he's got nothing on the unsettling nuance of Hurt's Richie.

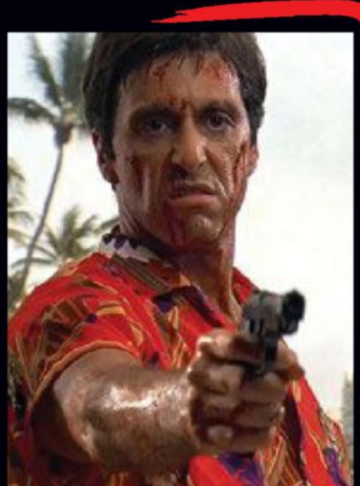
Top Dollar is far from the only crime boss to transition from the comic page to the silver screen. For all the flaws of the much maligned 2003 *Daredevil* movie (director's cut notwithstanding), credit is due to Michael Clarke Duncan who brings a genuine grittiness to that most notorious and meaty Marvel Comics crime lord, Wilson Fisk. Vincent D'Onofrio, on the other hand, wowed Netflix viewers by bringing an altogether more human quality to the

Kingpin. Writer Drew Goddard took what was essentially an overweight, bald-headed avatar and made him vulnerable and flawed, with a deep sense of longing. With a combination of revealing flashbacks that showcased Fisk's troubled adolescence and his awkward adult years, the running motif of blank space; he made for the MCU's most interesting baddy to date. The real strength, though, was in making the viewer root for Fisk every bit as much as Daredevil, as their end goals are fundamentally the same.

But perhaps the greatest mob boss of any comic has to be DC's Carmine Falcone. Conjured from the demented mind of Frank Miller, Falcone (dubbed The Roman) lords over Gotham's criminal underground. Given that Gotham is a continual cesspit of crime, that's a lot of territory. The character is, unsurprisingly, based on Don Vito Corleone, with many aspects of Falcone's family tree mirroring events in *The Godfather*. Since his debut in 1987, he's had numerous screen iterations, the best being in Christopher Nolan's uber-dark *Batman Begins*. Tom Wilkinson brings a strangeness to the role, opposite Christian Bale's Bruce Wayne, bordering on derangement, drunk on his own self-worth and power. His tinny voice and cloying accent only adds to the frightening aura surrounding the figure, conveying his cruelty whilst paying homage to the various incarnations that have graced the pages of DC comics in the decades before.

All the mob bosses thus far have been from the US and Canada, but the UK more than holds its own. In amidst the ensemble cast of Guy Ritchie's comedy crime caper Snatch, the stand-out performance is Alan Ford's Brick Top. Put simply, he's bloody terrifying; a deadly combo of small stature, terrible teeth, cockney geezer accent and his novel way of disposing of bodies (which he relishes in describing the grizzly details of). Martin McDonagh's abject crime comedy *In Bruges* gives us an altogether different take on the cockney crime boss. At first, Ralph Fiennes' short-tempered despot Harry Waters is revealed only in his phone calls: a barrage of swearing imaginatively strung together by the pithiness of McDonagh's writing. He's introduced to the viewer proper smashing up a telephone when his subordinate undermines his order. Unfortunately, his unflinching moral code sees him blowing his own brains out after mistakenly thinking he'd killed a kid. The DVD release came with a super-cut of every cuss word (also available on YouTube and well worth watching), it's over a minute and a half long, and the bulk is due in no small part to Fiennes' terrifically vulgar performance.

It's not all earth-bound. In fact, there's one notorious mob boss from a long time ago, in a galaxy far, far away. No other has quite the reach, influence and assets of Tatooine's own Jabba the Hutt. He might not have originally debuted until *Return of the Jedi*, but he was digitally retrofitted in that garish deleted scene in *Episode IV*, where no amount of CGI can mend the damaged celluloid. Though one film was all the slug man needed to show off his lethargy, nastiness and fetish for scantily-clad humanoids. Coupling a grim sense of humour and an insatiable hunger for gambling provides buckets of personality, making for a character as credible as any other fictitious crime boss you care to mention. Yes, there's *The Sopranos* and *Scarface*, Scorsese and Keyser Söze, but they've got nothing on Jabba's palace or pleasure barge. With that sorted, we're off to see a man about a sarlacc.



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LIVVY BOOTE IS...

THE GIRL FROM PLANET X

I don't like to watch a movie or a TV series just to criticise it. I watch things because I think I'll enjoy them, and then, if I find something worth criticising (which there always is, if you really care about what you're watching), I cross that bridge when I get to it. Life's no fun if you go into something deciding you won't like it. Similarly, when I choose a topic to write about, I usually decide to provide a balanced discussion of its representation of female characters, rather than write an angry rant. Because, in the end, as much as the media is hugely important in developing the way we think, we are only discussing a TV programme - what's an angry rant really going to do?

There are so many things that I still need to see, which would make a fun, positive article - like *Mad Max, Inside Out,* or *Sense8*, just as a few examples. But when I heard some of the whispers about *Jurassic World's* sexism floating underneath all the roaring praise of its record-breaking profit and viewing numbers, I decided, *"Hey, this could be interesting. Maybe I should watch that and talk about it."* Plus, I love dinosaurs, so there's that, too.

This isn't going to be an angry rant. I don't do angry rants - or at least I try not to. However, what it might be, I'm afraid, is a fairly ugly wake-up call to all those who saw *Jurassic World* and didn't see its glaring sexism. And for that - I'm sorry. But one thing I should say is that, even if a film has all of the misogynistic layers which I'm about to point out, that's not to say that you have to stop enjoying it. I thought Jurassic World was a fantastic movie, and I very much enjoyed myself. Just because you realise a film is problematic, doesn't mean you have to stop loving it.

Right, with that rather solemn introduction out of the way, let's dive into *Jurassic World.*

The movie follows two brothers who have come to Jurassic World to visit their Aunt Claire (Bryce Dallas Howard), who helps run the park. Claire doesn't want much to do with her nephews as she's busy running the park and doesn't do well around children. So, just as the two boys escape the guide hired by their aunt to show them around, leaving them vulnerable and unattended, naturally a terrifying, genetically enhanced dinosaur wreaks havoc within the park at exactly the same time. Luckily, Claire drags dinosaur trainer Owen (Chris Pratt) into the mix to help save her nephews and recapture the rogue dinosaur.

Even her outfit says 'ice-queen'. Actually, that's an amazing outfit...

Claire is your stereotypical, scary, cold business woman. Which would be fine because clearly she just cares about her job, right? There are plenty of women who put their job first, and is there anything so wrong with that if that's what makes her happy? Well, sure. But the problem with Hollywood's characterisation of business women is that they turn them into emotionless 'ice queens', people who have absolutely no feelings towards anyone else, or any personality beyond their designer clothes and scarily sharp haircuts.

The reason this characterisation is *so* toxic in *Jurassic World* specifically is because we're made to dislike Claire instantly. From the very beginning, everyone calls her heartless and cruel towards the dinosaurs, her family, and the guests. She cares so much about her job that she leaves her nephews to their own devices even though they've come to visit her - the way that business women are characterised like this in such a negative light is kind of a little boring, and kind of very offensive.

We're not supposed to like Claire for putting her job first. And definitely not when there's Chris Pratt on screen, the most charismatic person in the world. The dynamic between the two means that our affections lean so much towards Owen's character, that even when he says the most unashamedly sexist things I've heard for a while in a movie, we laugh and think 'oh isn't Owen so funny'. He mocks Claire for only being able to understand 'at least one' of the three 'basic' instincts - food, sex, and hunting. So, was he making a joke out of the fact that Claire doesn't eat? Or that she doesn't want to have sex? Either way, I really don't understand the joke at all, and yet because Owen is so charismatic, we all fall for him and dislike Claire in the process.

And it's not just Owen we side with - it's everyone. Claire explains that she can't get on with children, and her sister responds by saying, "*when you have children, you'll understand*". "*If*", Claire corrects. Her sister reiterates, "*When*". I thought that mindset had disappeared in the '90s; it's archaic at best.

That's when you spot what'll happen

THE DINOSAURS WERE NOT THE ONLY ANCIENT THINGS IN JURASSIC WORLD – THE ATTITUDES WERE TOO...

Claire gets the family she's apparently always wanted and needed.

to Claire's character; she'll turn from a cold business woman to loving, maternal Owen fan girl.

There is nothing wrong with women who want to focus on work. There is nothing wrong with women who want children and to fall in love. There is something wrong with the demonisation of one and the glorification of the other, and there is definitely something wrong with Claire being 'converted'. Maybe she would have naturally found that she wanted a boyfriend, become maternal without the help of a few rogue dinosaurs - and that's fine. But to imply that this is the outcome that women like Claire ought to arrive at, that this is a happy ending and that her life is finally on track - that is very uncool.

I've been seeing things online that complain about the fact that she's not 'badass' enough. She doesn't run around with rifles and take the lead. The thing is, that's actually the thing that I *don't* have a problem with - she's a CEO, not a hunter. Of course, she lets Owen take the initiative, it's only sensible. And she's wearing heels because that's what she wears to work, so before anyone starts moaning about how she should have taken them off when she was running through the forests looking for her nephews - dude, haven't you ever heard of Ginger Rogers and Fred Astaire? Ginger did everything Fred did, *backwards and in heels*. And Claire *does the whole movie* in heels. Cool.

So the writers have recognised that a female character doesn't have to be hard-core, physically strong, or masculine to be a strong female character. That's really brilliant and quite rare, so kudos to them for that. And yet, considering that Claire is supposed to be one of the two main characters, it feels like a huge step back from the first movie in terms of feminism. Why was she written so that the audience more often than not disliked her? Why did she have to 'soften', become more maternal? Why did she have to end up with Owen, even though they'd already established that they were completely incompatible?

Ok, to be fair, Chris Pratt is quite dreamy. But in this movie, he was also kind of an arsehole, specifically towards Claire. So, quite honestly, the fact that they ended up together made absolutely no sense. It served not only to prove that women should want to be with someone for their happy ending, but also to add that superficial romance factor that Hollywood seems to think is essential, reducing what little personality she had to a mere love interest. She was a main character who ended up being a mismatching accessory on Chris Pratt's arm, and, honestly, the whole thing *did* make me *really* angry.

I'm sorry. I said this wasn't going to be an angry rant, and I hope it didn't turn into that because it was a genuinely very good film. But that's why it's so frustrating; put a successful, well-written film in front of someone with an exciting, handsome lead role, and people don't want to see the blatant problems. There we are, that's life, I suppose.

And yet, aside from all the terrible sexism, the amazing dinosaurs, Chris Pratt being cool, and the excellent design of the park, there was only really one thing on my mind when I left the theatre.

Not enough Jeff Goldblum.

FEST HEAD

Words: Martin Unsworth

With FILM 4 FRIGHTFEST, the annual celebration of all things horror, almost upon us, we chatted to one of the head honchos, legendary journalist ALAN JONES, to get the skinny on the event...

STARBURST: How did FrightFest get started?
Alan Jones: Back in the year 2000, Paul McEvoy – who I didn't know – asked me to join him in setting up a horror film festival in the centre of London. He used to come to something I used to do in the eighties called Shock Around The Clock that I did at the Scala cinema and transformed into Fantasm at the National Film Theatre. I didn't like doing it at the NFT, they weren't the right place for a horror film festival; they don't understand it. As a result of that, it sort of faded away; I lost interest. Until Paul mentioned this. I'd been in on the festival circuit for thirty years, I'd been to all the really famous ones across Europe, and could never understand why London being a capital city never had a festival and I thought this was a really good chance for us to do something. It was baby steps to begin with, but because I had set up Shock Around The Clock with [*Shock Xpress* editor] Stefan Jaworzyn years ago, I knew basically what to do. Because I'd been a journalist for so long, I knew the film companies to talk to about getting films. It was easy enough. We got a really good audience the first year and looking back, it's grown and grown to where we are now.

What sort of selection process is there for the films?
Paul and I mainly do it, Ian [Rattray] every now and again stamps his feet and says 'I want this in, 'cos I like it!' and generally, it's OK and we'll say 'yes'. But Paul and I mainly do everything, we trawl every festival but submissions have been really, really more important this year than I've ever come across. We've had so many films submitted, and we do watch everything, because you never know. A lot of what you will see at FrightFest are those submissions, because we just couldn't believe the quality and how good they were. Things we didn't even know existed were turning up; titles we'd never heard of, and they were really fantastic. Paul and I are dogged about this – we watch *everything*!

That just proves the independent talent is flourishing, but what are your thoughts on the state of the horror genre at the moment?
I would say very, very good, very buoyant. Things are changing; the industry's changing so much. The reason why festivals like FrightFest work now, even more than they ever did, is because we can provide a platform for the sort of films you used to see on general release, but now they're lucky if they even get a day-and-date VOD platform. So for that reason, I think we're considered vital; if we select somebody's movie and show it, it puts it in the spotlight, head above the parapet, and as a result, we've given it like a seal of approval that it wouldn't necessarily have. From the submissions this year, the horror genre's in a very good state! We have some extraordinary stuff that I *know* is going to make sure the directors are going to go on to bigger and better things.

You screen a lot of independent movies, which is something we're passionate about supporting, is there anyone who you are looking forward to seeing more from?
Oh, I don't want to particularly single out any one in particular, but Adam Egypt Mortimer's *Some Kind of Hate* is such a great film, something that really came on our radar that we had no idea was that good. Michael Thelin, whose film *Emelie* really is sensational, it's one of my favourites this year, actually. Valentin Javier Diment, who's a guy from Argentina whose film *The Rotten Link* (*El eslabón podrido*) - we sort of thought 'oh we better go and see this' in Cannes because I've got a particular love of South American cinema. We went to see it not expecting anything, and it blew me away! I thought, 'Wow, where's this guy been hiding all these years?' There's stuff like that

- Adrián García Bogliano's new film *Scherzo Diabolico* is on, and we've been following his career for quite some time too. It's great to see these people who we nurtured in the past suddenly grow into full-blown talents. There's going to be a lot of that this year. We call one of the strands the Discovery Screen, because we want people to discover their own people for themselves. To this day, Vincenzo Natali credits me for helping his career because I gave *Cube* possibly the very first review he ever had (I was a reviewer for STARBURST for twenty-five years), and you can do that, but we can only program the stuff, and it's up to today's outlets to discover it and make those people famous. I love to do it, and love to put people on pedestals and say this is great, but I think from a programmer's point of view, you can't do that. In the past, I've noticed if I go out in front of an audience and say 'you're going to love this, it's fantastic', invariably, they say, 'well it wasn't as good as you said it was'. So to be honest, I keep my mouth shut, and afterwards, people come up to me and say, 'that was really good', and I say 'yeah, wasn't it?' And if they go, 'that was really not great' I can say 'yeah, I know' [laughs] in the way you can only provide the conduit between them. It's up to the likes of STARBURST to do that, I think, more than it is for me to say this is great, that's great. We've got a load of things I absolutely adore; *Curve* by Iain Softley – who's one of my favourite directors from the past anyway – he's come back into the spotlight with this amazing thing. There's loads of stuff like that: *Night Fare* by Julien Seri, the French director, what a great story that is! He did a movie called *Scorpion* that got released all round the world and was trying to get his next film off the ground but it never happened. So he thought, 'fuck this' and got eighty grand together and made *Night Fare*, which is possibly one of the best films, you'll particularly like that because of what it is. That's what I like about these people, especially now working in this genre level because sometimes money doesn't matter. We've got $100,000 movies and $20,000 movies, and I defy anyone to tell the difference in quality. It beats the studios at their own game.

And everyone has access to a camera now...
True. It's democratising this genre at the moment, I think. Anyone can go out and do something and if it's any good in any way whatsoever... we've got a 14-year-old French guy's film on called *Hostile* – we couldn't believe it. It's a great film, but when we found out Nathan Ambrosioni was only 14, we thought, 'Jesus, he can't even see it when we show it!' He's just made this great film, and I think it's just wonderful that people are going out and doing that.

The retro strand is becoming more popular, is there any particular film you'd love to show?
Well for years, I didn't want to do retro. For me, FrightFest was all about the new, the upcoming, and the exciting. So many people kept saying 'you should show something old'. I mean, *really*? And as we've done that, I've realised there is actual value, as unlike myself, who has seen everything in the cinema, a lot of people haven't seen favourite films screened. So I could see the value in that. So yes, I want to see – because giallo is a particular favourite of mine – I want to see more. I'm thrilled we've got *Your Vice is a Locked Room and Only I Have the Key* this year, I think I'm going to be droning on incessantly about that one at the front of that! So if anyone's turning up for that particular movie, I'm afraid they're going to hear *me* do a twenty-minute rave about giallo in general. I think it's important that we show stuff that's been restored; we can't just show a DVD or some crappy old print. I think we've got to have a reason for showing it, and as more companies – especially Arrow – restore half-way decent films, if they're quirky enough we'll put them on. We've got *Hawk the Slayer* on, I remember being on set for that, and it does seems to have built this incredible reputation, they are launching the sequel and Kickstarter campaign on the back of showing the original, and I can see why people like it. [See page 48]

Alan Jones' new book THE ACT OF SEEING, is a collaboration with DRIVE director NICOLAS WINDING REFN. The weighty tome is a lavish exploration of classic exploitation cinema poster art, with hundreds of glorious images and is published by FAB Press' new NWR Imprint on September 10th.

FILM 4 FRIGHTFEST takes place over Bank Holiday weekend, August 27th – 31st at Vue Cinemas, Leicester Square, London.

DO YOU LIKE TO WATCH?

STILL AS CONTROVERSIAL AND SHOCKING AS IT WAS ON ITS INITIAL RELEASE, WE GLARE THROUGH THE KEYHOLE TO FIND OUT MORE ABOUT THE CLASSIC PEEPING TOM...

BY MARTIN UNSWORTH

It's an accepted part of the cinematic experience that the audience are voyeurs. Every time we sit in front of the screen, be it at home or in the theatre, we are peering into the lives of others. Surreptitiously gaining access to parts of (albeit fictional) lives of people, watching them interact, go about their business and often get up to no good. It's strange, then, that when Michael Powell's *Peeping Tom* hit the big screen in 1960, audiences and critics alike were uncomfortable with the concept of cinemagoers watching, almost with complicity, a serial killer unflinchingly going about his business.

The film follows Mark (prolific but relatively unknown German actor Karlheinz Böhm, billed here under the Anglo-friendly name Carl Boehm), who is a lowly focus puller at a film studio by day, but makes ends meet by shooting 'glamour' photography in his spare time. The pictures are sold under the counter in a Soho tobacconists, although the door and inside walls are emblazoned with near nude photos and magazines. The proprietor is keen for Mark to provide more scintillating content for his clientele, something Mark is somewhat reluctant to do. You see, he has aspirations to be a proper filmmaker, not just pointing the camera at whatever a director wants, or taking nudie snaps for 'dirty old men'. Perhaps the biggest hurdle he faces in this quest, though, is his compulsion to film women. And not just those who are willing; at night he stalks the streets, picking up prostitutes and brutally murdering them. Every step of the way, his camera is rolling; at the moment of attack, it isn't sudden, instead, the leg of his tripod is converted to a sharpened spike, the reflector of the camera's lamp allowing the victim to watch every agonising moment of their death.

It's this particular part of Mark's modus operandi that makes his compulsion so sinister, but also makes it easier to trace the cause of the obsession. Mark is a shy, socially awkward fellow; the room at the top of a boarding house is his sanctuary. Little do the other residents know, but he owns the building. It's only when Helen (Anna Massey) befriends him out of curiosity when she spots him spying on her 21st birthday party that the truth begins to come out.

While showing Helen some of his father's home movies, which involved the young Mark being filmed being awoken from his sleep by his dad in some rather cruel ways, it's clear that he is continuing the fixation with filming his victims' reaction to fear.

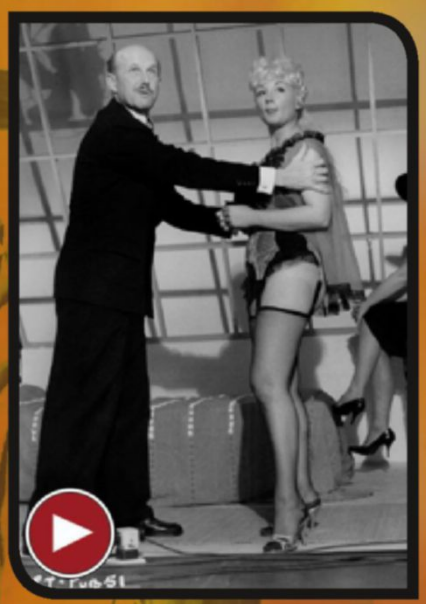
It's a film that practically finished the career of director Michael Powell. As half of the Powell-Pressburger team, he had made some of the greatest and most revered British films of the previous decades. *The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp* (1943), *A Matter of Life and Death* (1946), *The Red Shoes* (1948) and *The Tales of Hoffman* (1951) are all still held in high esteem. The industry treated him almost like a leper after this film's release, his reputation only beginning to be restored by the time of his death in 1990. But why would the film cause such problems at the time?

As well as portraying an uncomfortably realistic psychopath, *Peeping Tom* presents the modern viewer with a time capsule of how things were back in the fifties and sixties, particularly in London's Soho. Things remained pretty much this way until the more liberal eighties and these attitudes were almost expelled by the Internet age. One of the early standout sequences features the small shop in which Mark sells his photographs. An elderly gentleman (the fabulous character actor Miles Malleson, a veteran of several Hammer and Ealing films) shuffles up to the counter and asks if they have any 'views'. Pulling a large portfolio from under the counter, the shopkeeper enquires if he means photos 'like these?' An excited look appears on the man's face, which soon turns to awkwardness when a school child enters to buy a chocolate bar. It's a simple yet very effective and telling scene. One which ends with the man buying the whole book of photos, but declining the offer to be put on the shop's mailing list. So excited, he almost forgets to take with him his 'cover story' copy of The Times, which would be used to conceal the paper wrapper (marked 'educational

books') that hides the illicit photos. When he leaves, the shopkeeper quips, "*Well, he won't be doing the crossword tonight*"; he hints to Mark that he wants more explicit content in his work. "*What magazines sell the most?*" "*Those with women on the front covers and no front covers on the women*" Mark sheepishly replies in his pseudo-Peter Lorre tone. The film's frank portrayal of the 'underground' adult industry was rather groundbreaking, which was possibly another reason it didn't sit well with viewers at the time. Everyone knew it took place, lots of people bought it or were involved, but did they need to see it portrayed in such a manner?

The front pages of the newspapers highlight the murder of a prostitute (Brenda Bruce), which we have already seen in the gripping and disconcerting pre-credits sequence. Shot from the camera's perspective, through a crosswire viewfinder, we see the unwitting lady of the night lead her client to a bedroom. She begins to undress and then becomes terrified as it's clear an attack is imminent. There's a sudden cut to a cine projector, and we see Mark sat watching the footage in his room. It's all the more unsettling for the erratic piano score that accompanies it. By using this POV to establish the connection with Mark, we instantly become 'peeping toms', and are almost in collusion with the killer.

As we learn more about the troubled man, however, he becomes a very sympathetic character. Not quite enough to forgive his actions, but certainly enough to understand he is a product of nurture as opposed to nature. Occasionally, we see his awkwardness towards people, women in particular, but also another side. During a photo shoot with one model (genuine glamour legend Pamela Green), he's asked "*Can you fix it so the bruises don't show?*" A question repeated to him with the introduction of a new model – one who has a facial disfigurement. "*He said you needn't photograph my face*", she slurs. Rather than repulsed, Mark seems in awe, and hastily reaches for his personal cine camera. Filming right up close to her face, he is transfixed, "*It's my first time in front of eyes as full of...*" It's almost as though Mark has identified something in the woman that he can relate to, something that draws him in more than the overt sexuality of Green's veteran model; something damaged.



Throughout the film, the cameras - both Powell's and Mark's - replicate that most uncomfortable of things: the male gaze. Using it in such a blatant manner makes it even more troublesome to some viewers. It highlights how a natural instinct – to 'way up' a person on first sight – can be damaging and, indeed, violating. What's different here, and possibly why the use is so disturbing, is that Mark's intentions are actually not sexual. When confronted with the chance of physical closeness, he becomes an emotional wreck. By caring for Helen, as he does, he has to fight the urge to be with her because he may not be able to resist the risk to harm her. She, after all, tries to understand him and still likes him. The only person who thinks Mark is a threat is Helen's blind mother (Maxine Audley), who can 'sense' the wrongness in him. When confronted by her, he ends up struggling with the desire to kill her. The fact the fear she displays is not from her knowing what danger is before her stops him in his tracks; rendering him impotent, so to speak. He promises never to photograph Helen, and her mother pleads with him to get help.

As mentioned, the film was slated by critics when released. What's surprising is *Peeping Tom* was released just months before Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho*. Both movies are similar in theme: that of a murderer born from parental influence. Powell himself also appears in his film as Mark's father in the home movie 'experiments' - his own son, Columba, playing the young Mark. Hitchcock was famous for appearing in his pictures, but this was unlikely to have been the reason. Instead, it was more to 'keep it in the family' and ensure the boy on screen understood what was happening, so would not come away traumatised. The big difference (other than being in colour, of course) and possibly the reason *Peeping Tom* didn't share the same success as Hitchcock's classic is the sympathy the viewer feels for Mark. It's hard to imagine this repulsion now since the film is now rightly considered a masterpiece. Martin Scorsese put his name to a re-release in the late '70s and in doing so launched a reappraisal of Powell's 'dirty secret'.

It's lost none of its power to shock, make no mistake. *Peeping Tom* is a terrifying study of a psychopath, mainly because of the way it is so relatable to cinema in general. To the way audiences process what they see; to our power to find empathy with damaged characters. Most of all, though, it is because it exposes us all as voyeurs.

PEEPING TOM screens on Horror Channel (SKY 319, Virgin 149, Freeview 70, Freesat 138) on September 1st.

This month, the rollicking Robin Pierce completes his journey through the history of HAMMER's FRANKENSTEIN series...

SOME ASSEMBLY REQUIRED

By Robin Pierce

Part 3

The Curse of the Reboot

As the seventies dawned, it wasn't only the times that were changing, as audience tastes and attitudes were evolving as well.

When *The Curse of Frankenstein* had been produced in 1957, it had the distinct advantage of being only one of a very small handful of actual horror films that had been produced in Britain since the advent of the film industry. Despite the loud baying of outraged critics decrying the end of civilisation as we knew it at the hands of Hammer, the audiences had flocked to see Peter Cushing and Christopher Lee in a seemingly unending series of home-grown horror films, and other British-based companies

like Amicus and Tigon rushed to sate the hungry audience's appetite for lurid Eastmancolor blood. The sixties was a boom time for the British horror industry.

But the audience's thirst for more shocks and thrills, begun by Hammer, would also prove to be their undoing.

Hammer's quaint blend of bodice-ripping period dramas and bloody horror were failing to compete with the contemporary terrors of Roman Polanski's *Rosemary's Baby* or George A. Romero's *Night of the Living Dead*, both set in the modern day with younger leads.

Creatively stifled, Hammer were trying to catch up with changing audience tastes by showing a little more flesh and casting fresher actors to draw the audiences in.

It was decided that their foundation franchises both needed radical overhauls to bring them up to date and hopefully make them relevant to contemporary audiences who had outgrown the tried and trusted formula which Hammer had largely left unchanged since the late fifties. So, two years before poor Count Dracula was uncomfortably thrust into modern day London, Hammer had another fate in store for Baron Victor Frankenstein – oh, the horror – *The Horror of Frankenstein* (1970).

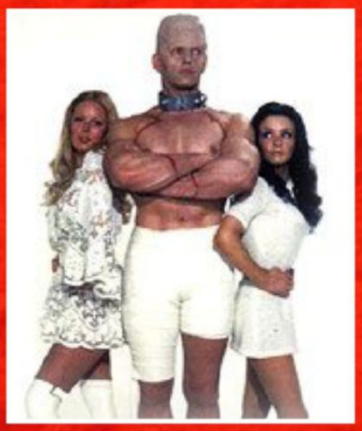
Put simply, *The Horror of Frankenstein* is a reboot of 1957's *Curse of Frankenstein*. Recast, as Peter Cushing was considered too old for the role of the young Baron (he was 57 at the time). Now in the role of Victor was 30-year-old Ralph Bates, who was being groomed as Hammer's new male lead, having previously appeared alongside Christopher Lee in *Taste the Blood of Dracula* as the satanic Lord Courtley. He would go on to star in *Lust for a Vampire* and *Doctor Jekyll and Sister Hyde* in 1971.

The Horror of Frankenstein's problems become apparent from the opening scenes, which show young Victor at his village school. Challenged by the teacher for having some anatomical illustrations in his desk, he refuses to accept being caned and uses his knowledge of the teacher's hypochondria to get the school closed for the afternoon. All well and good, except the cast can't pass for a bunch of teenaged school children. Bates himself sports his usual mutton chop side whiskers in these scenes, making him the least convincing teenager since Steve McQueen in *The Blob*. Leading lady Veronica Carlson, stunning as she is, doesn't look like a schoolgirl either – she was 26, and making her second consecutive appearance in a Frankenstein film, having been brutalised by Cushing in *Frankenstein Must Be Destroyed*; overall, this was her third and final Hammer film since her debut for the company as the virginal Maria in *Dracula Has Risen From The Grave* in 1968.

Inexplicably, the tone of *Horror of Frankenstein* was less horror and more comedic, with a leaning toward the sex comedies that were prevalent at the time of the so-called permissive society. Even the press book stated in a paragraph that seems unbelievably sexist today: "*You will see Frankenstein forsake test tubes and Bunsen burners for a romp in a fine four poster with the delicious Kate O'Mara. And no man can be criticised for that*".

The character of Frankenstein is devoid of all sympathy in this film; he sabotages his father's hunting rifle to cause a fatal accident so he can go to university. He leaves when he gets the dean's daughter pregnant, returns home and saves his old school friend Elizabeth (Carlson) and her father from a gang of highwaymen, killing and then beheading one in cold blood, and then gets to work creating his man-made man.

The comedy is provided by various clumsy sexual references, some dated jibes at the welfare state and the using of a severed hand to deliver a two-fingered salute to the outraged dean. All schoolboy stuff, really. More suited to the *On the Buses* series of bawdy double



entendre comedies Hammer was also producing at the time.

As his relationship with the respectable Elizabeth grows, so does his lewd bedding of the buxom maid Alys (Kate O'Mara), as he demands from her the same level of service she gave his late father.

Poor Alys, however, is destined to become a victim of the creature, played this time by David Prowse, the British Bodybuilding Champion who, by the end of the decade would be known as the baddest of all bad guys – Darth Vader. His appearance in *The Horror of Frankenstein* is that of a bald, Karloff-esque monster, with a square head and overhanging brow and some truly awful drawn-on scars around his shoulders.

The monster meets his end, just as he did in *The Curse of Frankenstein*, falling to his death in a vat of acid, which dissolves all the evidence, leaving the cocky young Victor Frankenstein with no charges to answer and a smirk on his face.

However, that smirk would be short-lived, as in 1972, Frankenstein would return – in *Frankenstein and the Monster from Hell*, with Peter Cushing back in his familiar role, and the prolific Terence Fisher back in the director's chair once again. This would be Hammer's final Frankenstein film, and given the changeable quality, the Baron would at least be leaving on a high note.

Co-star Shane Briant was another of Hammer's fresh new faces, having appeared in *Demons of the Mind* (1972). He appears as Dr Simon Helder, who is following the teachings of Victor Frankenstein, purchasing the wares of bodysnatcher Patrick Troughton. He's experimenting with eyes, and has a jar full of them, which unfortunately end up spoiled and spilled on the floor during a struggle when Helder is trying to explain what he's doing to a hapless police constable. Helder is arrested for sorcery (which is news to us, we didn't realise that sorcery was an arrestable offence).

The Court sentences him to five years in an asylum, which seems fine by Helder, as he's still following in the footsteps of his hero. Committing the same crimes, convicted by the same court, sent to the same institution.

His arrival at the institution sees him brutalised by two orderlies after tricking his way to seeing the institution's director (John Stratton), who tells Helder that Frankenstein has died, before realising that Helder is actually a patient and screams for help. Seemingly, the orderlies who punish him with the high pressure fire hose in front of all the other inmates are the ONLY orderlies in the entire establishment.

Their bullying humiliation of Helder continues until they are stopped by the resident physician Dr Carl Victor (Frankenstein's latest cover name).

Frankenstein controls the asylum, having blackmailed the corrupt and sex-crazed director into helping him fake his latest death. Helder will be Frankenstein's assistant, tending to the patients with the help of the beautiful but mute 'Angel' (Madeline Smith).

As they go about their rounds, Frankenstein reveals that he has a wing of patients that he alone will attend to. These include a brilliant professor of mathematics who has tried to murder the director, a sculptor, and a literal beast of a man – a Neanderthal throwback with a penchant for stabbing his victims in the face with broken glass. Though, this one isn't really a threat any longer - he bent the bars of his cell and tried to escape, but plunged to his doom.

Of course, all isn't what it seems – Frankenstein has preserved the hulking body of the massive man-beast and it's forming the basis of his latest experiment, hidden in a secret lab, behind a concealed door. Frankenstein's 'special patients' are the unknowing organ donors-in-waiting,

in an echo of *The Revenge of Frankenstein* (1958). This becomes apparent to Helder when the sculptor passes away suddenly and is buried without his hands.

Dave Prowse became the only actor to play Frankenstein's monster twice in Hammer's series, though he's unrecognisable in the heavily-padded monster suit he wears this time around. As Helder discovers Frankenstein's set-up, he remarks that the surgery on the creature seems clumsy. Frankenstein takes off his black gloves and shows his blistered and disfigured hands, now no use for the delicate surgery his work demands. *"They were burned in the interests of science"* (again, a reference to his inability to perform surgery in *Frankenstein Created Woman* (1966). The work is done by the Angel, under Frankenstein's supervision. But the monster needs eyes, which are Helder's speciality.

He also needs a brain, which is donated by the professor who succumbs to a suicidal urge, hanging himself with his violin strings after Frankenstein 'accidentally' leaves his medical notes in the professor's cell, showing him to be incurable.

The next stage of Frankenstein's experiment is to mate the creature with Angel, which is a step too far even for Helder, who threatens to report Frankenstein to the director, not realising that Angel's muteness was caused by her attempted rape by her own father – the director. This is the basis of Frankenstein's blackmail.

There is another problem – rather than have the brain control the body as we've seen happen in previous entries in the series, this time the body seems to be taking over the brain and when enraged, the monster immediately reverts to breaking a glass vial and attempting to use it as a weapon. The professor's brain is rapidly losing control of a body it can't control and in a fit of rage, having exhumed some of the bodies of the other patients who are missing hands, brains and so on, he goes on a rampage with the director as the first victim on the hit list.

He stabs the director in the throat with a broken bottle before wandering into sight of the other inmates who are being evacuated for their own safety. The inmates turn on the monster and literally tear him to pieces, throwing bits and pieces of his organs around, and eating them.

The film ends with Frankenstein calmly ordering them all back to their cells, with Helder and Angel, beginning the clean-up. After all, you can't begin a new experiment with a dirty lab, and Frankenstein already has in mind who the next unwitting donors will be from the patient list.

Although filmed in 1972, *Frankenstein and the Monster from Hell* wouldn't be released until 1974, and then as one half of Hammer's last double bill with *Captain Kronos – Vampire Hunter* (which also starred Briant), as the other feature.

It was more overtly graphic in its scenes of surgery, especially when we see a discarded brain accidentally kicked to pieces on the floor, but it was the scenes of the monster's demise that were causing problems. The British Board of Film Censors, as it was called at the time, only granted the film an X-certificate after the scenes of the inmates tearing the monster apart and splashing in its blood were trimmed of their more disturbing angles. Box office business was dismal...

A Frankenstein film, however gory, still paled in comparison with the likes of *The Exorcist*, which had started a new vogue in horror – much as *Curse of Frankenstein* had seventeen years earlier.

The door to the House of Hammer was creaking as it closed.

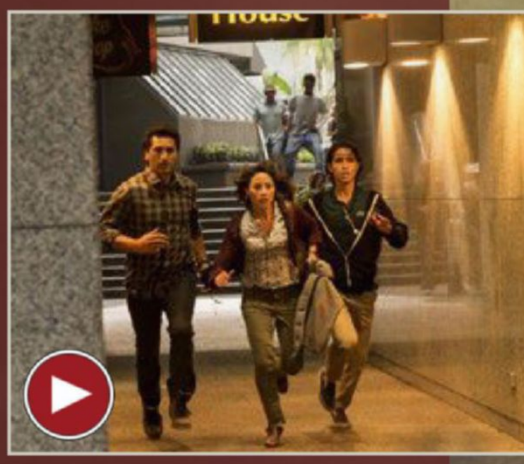
Frankenstein will be making a cinematic comeback this year, with ***Candyman*** *director Bernard Rose's contemporary update screening at Film 4 FrightFest, and the James McAvoy/Daniel Radcliffe vehicle* ***Victor Frankenstein*** *released in November.*

FEAR BEGINS HERE

BY KIERON MOORE

After five seasons of *The Walking Dead*'s Rick, Darryl, and oft-doomed friends wandering the Atlanta forests, fans have grown to love this select group of survivors. But their adventures are only a small part of a worldwide zombie apocalypse – there are so many other stories waiting to be told in Robert Kirkman's brutal world. Combining this with the unwavering popularity of *The Walking Dead*, it's no surprise that, back in September 2013, a spin-off series was announced.

As we came to learn more about this series, first referred to using the codename *Cobalt* before the somewhat less underwhelming title *Fear the Walking Dead* was settled on, it only became more intriguing. The action's moved west to Los Angeles, but the more significant move is backwards in time. Whereas its parent show's first season skipped over the early days of the outbreak,



GREG NICOTERO: ON THE WALKERS:

"This is quite early on, as opposed to TWD where Rick's been in a coma for a few weeks, so this is much more like someone not really looking quite well. They just look a little sickly. Your instinct isn't going to be 'oh I should shoot that guy in the head'.
We still have a couple of our signature moments in the first few episodes. They are freshly turned… there's still the humanity there, you still see a little bit of life in their eyes, you don't necessarily feel afraid of them."

with Andrew Lincoln's Rick lying in a convenient coma while chaos broke out around him, this series aims to fill in that gap and explore exactly how the world went from civilised society to dog-eat-dog-eat-brains wasteland.

Unlike its predecessor, this sort-of-prequel isn't based on any of Robert Kirkman's comic books, though the Kentucky-born author is still one of the main creative minds behind it, along with *Sons of Anarchy* writer Dave Erickson, who's serving as showrunner. Erickson and Kirkman, who's enjoyed the creative opportunity to make a series not "*tethered by the events of the comic book*", have created a new set of characters whose lives we'll be fearing for, focusing mainly on one dysfunctional family unit and their experiences of society's breakdown.

Kim Dickens (who you might recognise from *Gone Girl*, *Deadwood* or *Treme*) leads the cast as high school guidance counselor Madison Clark, and is joined by Cliff Curtis (from, err, *Whale Rider*) as her English teacher fiancé Travis Manawa. Madison has two kids from a previous marriage – troubled Nick (young Lord Voldemort himself, Frank Dillane), who's battling a drug problem, and high-achiever Alicia (*The 100*'s Alycia Debnam-Carey). We'll also meet Travis' free-spirited ex-wife Liza (*Orange is the New Black*'s Elizabeth Rodriguez) and son Chris (newcomer Lorenzo James Henrie), who's not so happy with his dad for having divorced. So, as you can imagine, this gang have a load of problems going on, and that's before the dead start coming back to life…

A series of teaser trailers have hit the Internet showing walkers sneaking up on poor unsuspecting bit-part actors going about their everyday lives; these were followed by a longer trailer released at Comic-Con finally introducing us to our leads. Both give a good idea of the show's tone – rather than the manic fight for survival we're used to, *Fear the Walking Dead* (for the first season, at least) will give us a sense of slowly rising terror, starting off in a very recognisable Los Angeles that will gradually descend into chaos. The school at which Madison works notices a large amount of kids off sick, as a virus begins to sweep the city. But flu jabs alone aren't enough to halt this illness, and soon people are watching

GALE ANNE HURD: ON THE ZOMBIE APOCALYPSE:

"There's an expectation that if you have money you can buy your way out of the apocalypse, and that's something else we'll be dealing with."

GREG NICOTERO: ON HOW FEAR THE WALKING DEAD WILL DIFFER FROM THE ALREADY POPULAR SIBLING:

"There's no comparison – you can't really compare the two shows. TWD has these bigger than life characters, what's great about this show is they are everyday people. They are people who you want to experience with them what they would do when faced with those situations. What the shows do share is the way they change people. That is what's fascinating."

shaky phone footage of police gunning down suspects only for them to stand right back up. Before anyone knows it, granddad's back from his grave and is hungry for flesh.

This bustling urban environment should provide a nice change from the forests of Atlanta, with the densely populated area a fertile breeding ground for chaos, paranoia and the undead, and allowing the show's writers to explore modern policing and politics, as well as the mass anxiety that comes with epidemics, as they show us how this city reacts to the upcoming apocalypse.

With *Fear* set at the other end of the States, and in a different time period, to the show it shares three quarters of its name with, there are no direct crossovers planned, so if you're expecting Darryl to pop up you'll be disappointed. However, the two series are going to be clearly set in the same world, with creator Robert Kirkman having explained: *"There will be hints and moments in the second show that if you go back and watch the first season of The Walking Dead will inform some of the discoveries that they had... We are trying to form an overall tapestry of a TV universe."*

A common rumour has been that there'll be a connection to *The Walking Dead* Season One's Centre for Disease Control, and Noah Emmerich's Dr. Edwin Jenner, but this remains unsubstantiated.

After an initial pilot went down well with studio executives, AMC ordered two seasons of *Fear the Walking Dead*. The first, comprised of six episodes, will air this summer before *The Walking Dead* returns for its sixth season, and the second will be a longer run and will air sometime next year.

If *Fear the Walking Dead* proves as popular as the original show, which has several seasons in it yet, there'll be no stopping the steady onwards walk of this zombie-infested world, and soon we'll be watching *The Walking Dead UK*, *The Walking Dead Take Manhattan*, *The Walking Dead in Space*, and who knows what more? Until then, remember your flu jabs, lock your doors, and get ready for some quality fearing.

FEAR THE WALKING DEAD premieres on AMC in the US on August 23rd, with a British broadcast expected soon after exclusively on BT's YouView platform.

LONG LIVE THE NEW FLESH

By Dominic Cuthbert

Censored and almost ignored on its initial release, it's time to re-examine the prophetic world of VIDEODROME...

David Cronenberg's filmography is typified by two components: the invasive body horrors of his early career, and the dark psychological dramas that earned him critical plaudits in the new century. By *Scanners*, his post-human horrors were already showing many of the signs that would later define him, but the two aspects met in the middle with his first studio film, 1983's *Videodrome*. He'd pioneered the idea of 'plastic reality' in the late seventies, in which you take a metaphor and visualise it in its most literal form (other advocates include Clive Barker and Brian Yuzna), and *Videodrome* was the apex. This was horror as manifesto; literary metaphor made cinematic, made tangible, made flesh.

The idea for *Videodrome* is one born of Cronenberg's adolescence, where he'd pick up late-night American television signals after the Canadian networks had gone off air (Canada itself was an early adopter of cable TV). He'd watch with a mix of trepidation and awe, never sure whether to turn away, but unable to stop from looking, afraid all the while that he'd discovered a forbidden broadcast.

This idea took root and gestated, with the final product drawing many subtle parallels with the director's own experiences and encounters. The dawn of the 1980s saw the rise of the VHS, and the lack of any regulations coupled with the growing suspicion surrounding the new technology no doubt fed into the idea that mutated into *Videodrome*. The story, however, started life in 1972 as a screenplay principally titled *Network of Blood*, a fitting, if schlocky, premise.

The film, which Andy Warhol hailed as 'the *Clockwork Orange* of the eighties', introduces viewers to Max Renn (James Woods), a sleazy, morally ambivalent cable network CEO, specialising in softcore skin-flicks and lo-fi violence. Convinced that the public are after ever more explicit content, and with the help of his ace-up-the-sleeve TV pirate Harlan (Peter Dvorsky), Max is introduced to a live broadcast of sadism and murder. He argues that TV is catharsis; acting as a healthy outlet for our collective violent and sexual impulses. Through the film's events, we know this claim to be false, and that Cronenberg occupies the opposite stance. Far from the liberation Max expected, the broadcast, Videodrome, has a negative effect, coddling his base urges and primal hungers. So begins his spiralling obsession and unearthing of the dark machinations of mass media.

Max discovers that Videodrome is more than just a show; it's in possession of a philosophy, and that's what makes it dangerous. Its prime mover is professor and media prophet Brian O'Blivion (Jack Creley, in a role based on Canadian philosopher of communication theory Marshall McLuhan, who believed that media and technology make up the social fabric). O'Blivion only ever appears on TV screens and, like Max, believes that TV will bring about a better tomorrow. He even runs the Cathode Ray

Mission, where vagrants are able to get their daily fix of the idiot box. Though his intentions are philanthropic, a clandestine corporation fronting themselves as Spectacular Ocular kills him in order to broadcast Videodrome, manipulating the masses with its carcinogenic signal. And they'd been stringing Max along from the very beginning, planting the signal for him to discover, and for them to use him for their own ends.

Cronenberg was insistent on casting James Woods in the lead, as he possessed many of the same intense quirks and characteristics that he had envisioned. Woods jumped at the chance of working with the director of *The Brood*, getting on board after reading the 70-page script. Max is a difficult character to like, but Woods plays him strangely sympathetically, even if you aren't rooting for him the whole time. His ad libs add a new depth, making the character every bit Woods' creation as the director's. Dipping pizza crusts in his espresso certainly won us over.

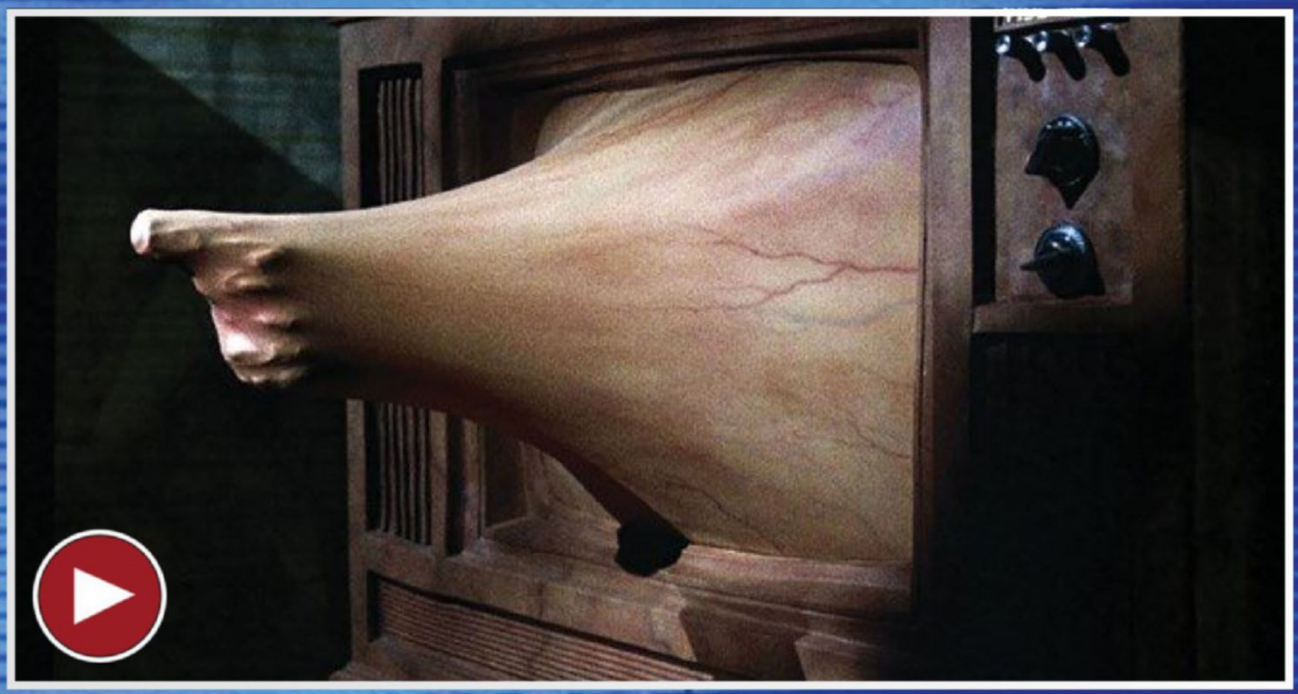
Debbie Harry of post-punk group Blondie, who were already five albums into their career by 1981, had been plugged into the underground/aboveground New York of the seventies; earning celebrity kudos, yet hanging out with countercultural figures like Allen Ginsberg and William Burroughs. Harry's shtick was pure rock star satire, and Cronenberg was very aware that she didn't have much acting experience, drawing a line between her self-parodying onstage antics and what takes place on a film set. Harry's first solo album, 'KooKoo', was released prior to production in July 1981, with a cover boasting a H. R. Giger rendition of her punctured face; the striking image must have helped convince Cronenberg that she was right for the role. But, strangely, Universal Pictures were somewhat irate about casting a Blondie who wasn't blonde - Harry had returned to her natural darker colour for KooKoo's release. She was a consummate professional, giving a dynamic and image-shattering performance as radio personality Nicki Brand. Comfortable in her masochistic sexuality, she gradually falls deeper into derangement; lost in the fever dream of Max's damaged psyche.

Even with the quality cast, a film this reliant on plastic effects needed somebody who was up to the task. Coming off of his Academy Award-winning work on *An American Werewolf in London*, special effects artist Rick Baker took his London-based makeup effects company (EXF) and relocated to Canada for the shoot. Baker demonstrated some of his most ground-breaking work in the various viscera of *Videodrome*, from the fleshy television to the vaginal opening on Max's stomach. Even the more dated effects give the film a cheap intoxicating quality that only adds to the terror of its (un)reality. It was a discomfort encouraged by Howard Shore's score, described by author and critic Tim Lucas as 'bio-electronic' because of the process of its composure. It was first written, then programmed into a synthesiser, before being played back by a computer with live stringed accompaniment for maximum eerie otherness.

More than the fleshy effects, the production design proves remarkably fresh. It marked the third collaboration with Cronenberg for production designer Carol Spier, and her set dressing is both cunning and subtle. The tug boat interior in the final scene in particular requires a double take after realising it's a set rather than on location. The set of *Videodrome*, though, is her greatest contribution, with

the voracious red contrasting the lo-fi colour palate of Max's apartment. It was the same shade of red reported to have sent prisoners of war into derangement after regular exposure.

Despite having all the right players in all the right places, it was a hand to mouth production, with little in the way of preparation. Filming began in Toronto in late October 1981, and due to a limited production window, Cronenberg was forced to start shooting with an unfinished script. It was being written and rewritten right through the production, accounting for some of the plot discrepancies, narrative dead ends and continuity issues. Even after principal photography wrapped up, the script still needed frequent rewrites. Cronenberg wasn't even sure how the film was going to end! When he read the script, James Woods remarked that he didn't like the ending. Cronenberg agreed, and together they shot three - a combination of pick-ups and crafty editing. Woods claims that the ending used in the final feature was his own contribution, the idea that it was all a self-fulfilling suicidal prophecy. The following year, pick-ups were shot to make up for lost time and to accommodate ideas that formed in the editing room. Even with the extra attention, there were still



scenes that proved too expensive, time-consuming or just too weird for Universal.

The explicit content was bound to upset censors on its release, and upset them it did. It's ironic that a film whose central thesis is that media is corruptive to the point of transformation would itself be deemed harmful enough to be cut to the umpteenth degree. Various cuts were made prior to its theatrical release, and Cronenberg even quipped that he had to travel to Buffalo in order to see the film in its complete state. In whatever form, the film opened to scathing reviews from top critics and repulsion from audiences. Roger Ebert was particularly negative, stating it was one of the least enjoyable movies he'd ever seen, but not all critics were as damning. Others praised its technical prowess and effects, though lamenting its confusing and meandering narrative. In the UK, the original video release was heavily cut to shorten or remove many of the sadomasochistic interactions between Woods and Harry, including the staged ear piercing. Some of the more violent scenes were also trimmed, particularly the grisly death of Barry Convex as he's viciously consumed by cancer (an effect which took a whopping 10 people to achieve). Most bizarrely, the Japanese softcore porn flick Samurai Dreams, being the production's first footage shot, was trimmed so that it didn't fully show a dildo.

Cronenberg is no stranger to censorship, and frequently bemoans its existence and that of critics, though *Videodrome* earned him his best critical nods at that time. He believes that nothing should be off limits when it comes to the sexual or visceral, and he's rigidly opposed to censorship of any kind. In the backlash to *Videodrome*, his apoplectic opinion was wholly justified, particularly in the case of England. The constabularies of both Nottinghamshire and Leicestershire warned video outlets about stocking *Videodrome*. The CIC Video release was cut by about three minutes, and various other versions have followed, each at different lengths. A closing credit sequence which saw two female characters grow penises was cut for being too weird and disturbing for mainstream taste, which is ultimately the whole film's major shortcoming. It was just too much for the populist palate.

Decades ahead of its time, *Videodrome* pointed out how society is never satisfied with its means of entertainment, and effectively predicted the growing control of mass media. It hypothesised our increased dependence on interpersonal technology, the influx and popularity of reality TV and the availability of extreme content in forbidden places (as well as, incidentally, the internet as a public commodity). People today are involved with technology in a more personal and intimate way than ever. You only need to take a train journey to see people obsessively tapping at their phones and tablets, and realise that *Videodrome* isn't all that far-fetched (just replace every uttered 'television screen' with 'touch screen' and you get the picture). Brian O'Blivion postured that we would all have TV names, and given that many of us go by one or more usernames on social networks, it was uncannily prophetic. Even engaging in two-way onscreen conversation isn't so novel anymore; just think of all the practical and personal applications of Skype. That's all on top of its predictions of technological advancements that are still unfurling today, like virtual reality, and video games becoming ever more immersive (a theme Cronenberg later explored in the 1999 film *eXistenZ*). Eagle-eyed viewers will even spy Atari controllers atop the fleshy television.

It was a box office bomb, earning only $2m of its $6m budget back. But a film this grungy, grimy and gloopy was only ever destined to fail. Even for fans, the plot is at times impenetrable and almost impossible to completely decode; everything is real while everything is simultaneously unreal, like psychedelic tangents of the mind. But this only adds to its longevity. The long-gestating remake is likely to ditch the nuance of the plastic reality in favour of more explicit sexual violence and gut-churning gore. After all, *Videodrome* posed the question of whether explicit images unlock primal urges in the brain, making the viewer more susceptible to other messages. Truly, this is horror at its most frightening.

David Cronenberg's VIDEODROME is available now in a limited edition set from Arrow Video.

INDEPENDENTS DAY

by Paul Mount

Warren Dudley

The STARBURST quest to uncover the best new talent in film continues as we talk to British director WARREN DUDLEY about his début movie THE CUTTING ROOM...

Warren Dudley had just £12,000 at his disposal when he made his inventive 'found footage' movie *The Cutting Room*. College students Raz, Charlie and Jess set about working on their 'end of year' Media Studies project and their investigation into cyberbullying leads them down a dark and dangerous path involving the mysterious disappearance of two local girls and a psychopathic killer lurking in the dark tunnels of a long-abandoned army barracks. Warren opened up about the trials and tribulations of making horror on a shoestring and creating an end product more unnerving and gripping than any number of bland Hollywood horror franchises.

STARBURST: How did *The Cutting Room* come about and why did you decide to make a 'found footage' movie?

Warren Dudley: I consider myself a writer predominantly. I have a big movie project in the pipeline called *The Bromley Boys*, which is a sort of football memoir I wrote four or five years ago, but that's a million pound budget movie and while the money was being raised on that one, I found myself getting bored. So at the start of last year I thought '*I'm gonna make a movie*'. I knew we had ten or twelve thousand quid and I think that 'found footage' really is the only possible way to make a movie on that budget. I think if you try to make a traditionally shot film on twelve grand it shows on screen and I think you'll struggle. I've been writing for seven or eight years now and doing comedy bits and pieces and this is my first attempt at horror. It's the only genre you can make a tiny budget movie in; it's very difficult to make a tiny budget romcom or thriller! Horror fans are less judgemental and a tiny budget horror done well is better than a big budget horror done badly. I think found footage *should* be low budget; the moment you throw two million dollars at one of those movies, you lose all the charm that the genre should have. *Cloverfield* was great and done quite nicely, but clearly it was a massive budget movie, not really 'found footage', but just hanging its hat on the genre a bit.

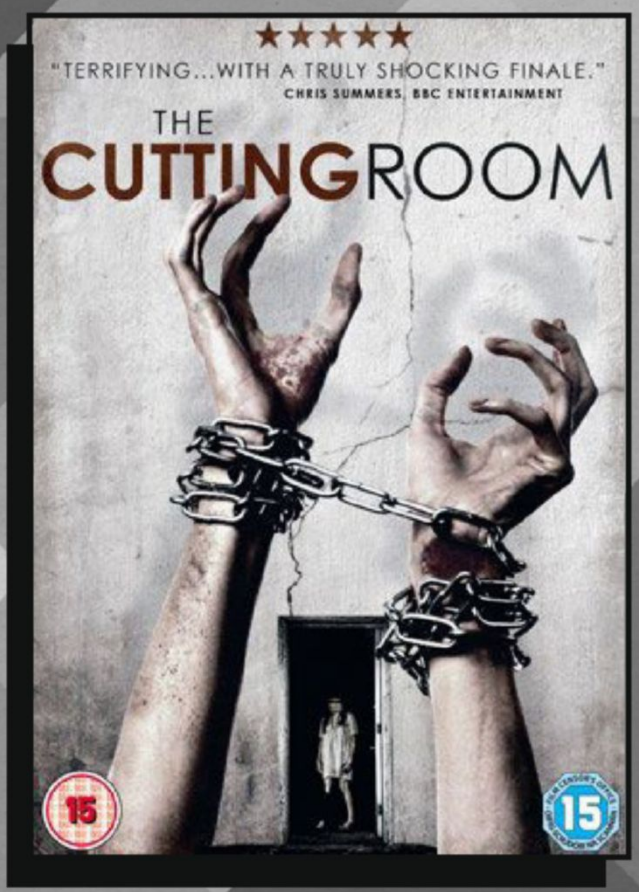
£12,000! How did you raise the finance for the film?
It's quite interesting where our money came from. TJ [Herbert] who plays the teacher Mark Kallis in the film said to me a couple of years ago about the script for *The Bromley Boys*, '*Do you mind if my Uncle James reads it?*' so I thought '*Go on then*' and I suddenly put two and two together and said '*Your Uncle's not* ***James*** *Herbert, is he?*' and he said '*Yes*'. Sadly, James passed away a couple of years ago, but his brother John is TJ's dad, and he funded the movie so it's got a really nice sort of British horror connection.

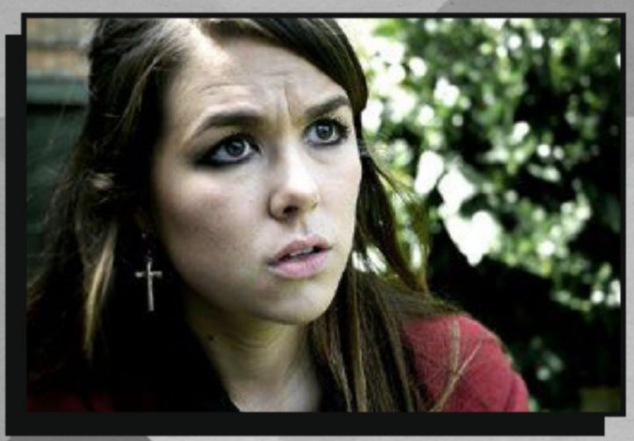
We loved the film's killer 'twist' – and we won't give it away here. How has that gone down with your audience?
It's such an interesting thing because I got you with the twist, but for some people it was the thing that annoyed them most because they said they got it straight away. The review side of it has been such an eye-opener; some people hate it so much that it's remarkable how much venom there is on Amazon and IMDB, and yet some people really like it. I'd rather have that than a 'meh' movie that no-one really likes and no-on really hates. I'd rather have one that people argue about.

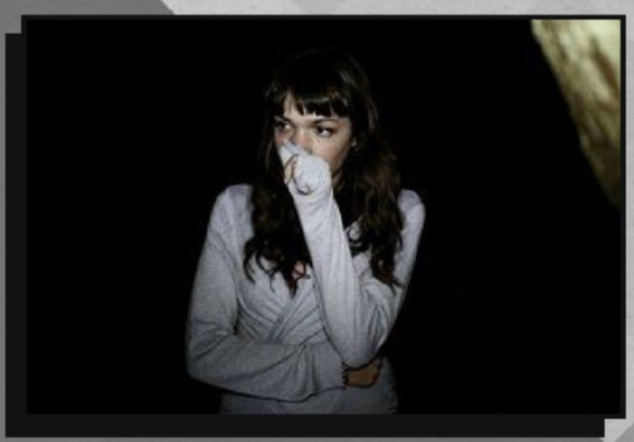
How did you go about creating the story for the film?
I've had the story idea rattling around for a while. Obviously, the idea of the three media students isn't exactly a brand new one, but I had to write every scene to our tiny budget. So where the three kids live is my flat, my sister's house and my mum's house and all the tunnel stuff is at Newhaven Fort in East Sussex, where my wife is the Events Manager! It's an old Victorian fort, open to the public and it's an incredible location with this network of tunnels in the cliffs. When you've got twelve thousand quid you have to think about every scene and where you can shoot it. But I liked the idea of doing a found footage movie where there was no 'demon', no kind of supernatural element - the camera crackling when the ghost's in the room. I thought a found footage movie where there's an actual person doing these terrible things to these girls that might be scarier than just a ghost. The story isn't breaking down any barriers but with a horror movie, if you can scare people or get them to jump once or twice, then you've done your job. I've watched a lot of horror films that just aren't scary. I can see that the script was scary but the film isn't, so something's gone wrong in the middle somewhere. But personally, I think the first person found footage style is the scariest because you're in there with them.

The cast all seem very relaxed, confident and naturalistic in their roles. How did you go about casting the movie – especially with so little money available?
We had about 250 applicants for the roles and we saw probably about 20, but if I'm being honest those three - Parry Glasspool as Raz, Lucy-Jane Quinlan as Charlie, and Lydia Orange as Jess - were the three showreels I really liked. Lucy Quinlan did a film with Leslie Grantham a few years ago where she was playing a swaggering cockney girl and as soon as I saw her I thought '*There's Charlie*'. We were really lucky with Parry because he got a high-profile gig in *Hollyoaks* when we were shooting and that's really helped because he's got a big gang of teeny girl fans, which is exactly the market I want because I think we can scare them! For people like us, found footage more or less started with *Blair Witch* and it's still quite a new thing for us, but if you're 18 or 19, it's just always been in their lives, it's not a new or old thing, it's just a genre. They weren't born when *Blair Witch* came out!

THE CUTTING ROOM







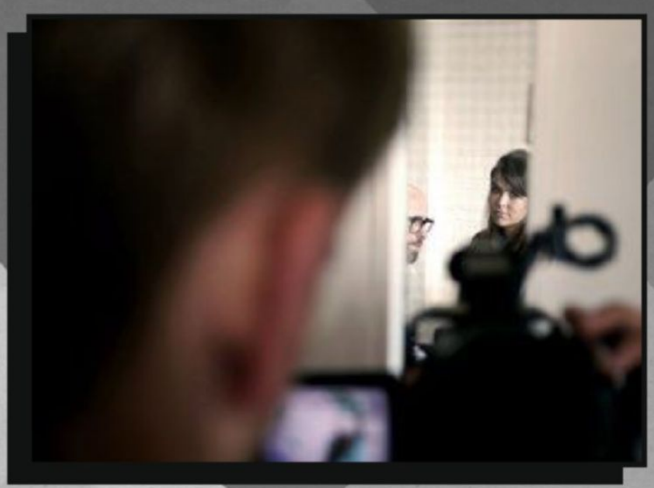
With so little money available, the actual filming schedule must have been extremely tight?
We shot over ten days with one camera, which is incredibly quick. The lighting in the tunnels was a torch! But that made life easier because we could shoot and shoot because we had no set-ups and because the fort is buried into the cliffs we could shoot night scenes in the day, so we shot plenty of stuff. If we'd shot it traditionally with two cameras and lighting set-ups we'd have been there for a month and it would have been out of our range.

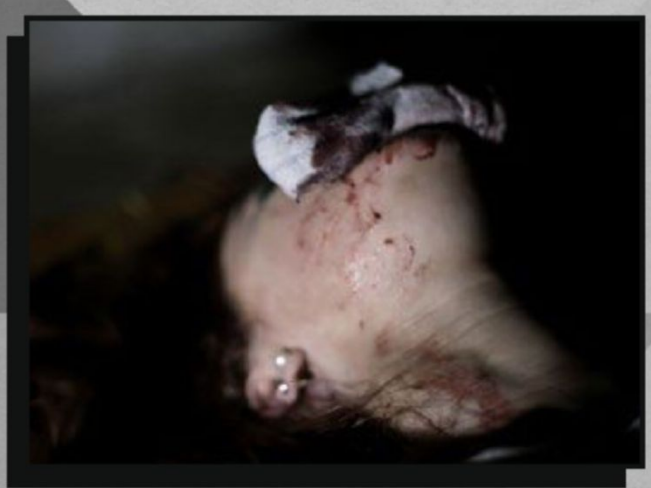
There's one startling gory 'money shot' towards the end of the film – presumably again for budgetary reasons. What do you think of the trend towards more extreme horror movies?
I think the first *Hostel* and the first *Saw* were really interesting movies. The later *Saw* films were just disgusting. I was watching number 4 or 5 recently, and there was a scene where a guy was trying to get a key out from behind his eye with a scalpel in the first minute, and I thought *'I can't watch it, it's too much.'* I'm much happier with tension, you shouldn't need blood and guts. When the blood and guts does come in ours, I think it's a little bit shocking.

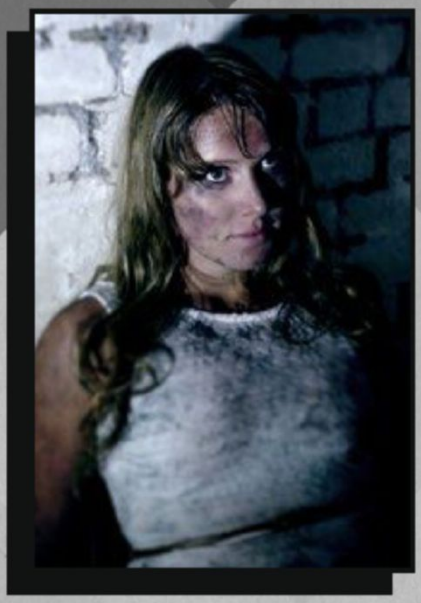
Did you make a conscious effort to try to avoid some of the chaotic clichés which tend to bedevil 'found footage' movies?
It's very difficult to avoid all of them, obviously. I think in the first hour you start to forget that it's 'found footage' because I kept the camera quite still and you start to feel a little bit like you're watching a documentary because the shaky camera stuff can get a bit wearing. In the end, when we get down into the tunnels, we needed to get the energy up a bit so you do end up with lots of girls screaming '*Let's get out of here*' because that's part of the genre and you need it really, but I think the fact we didn't go supernatural was probably the biggest thing we did right.

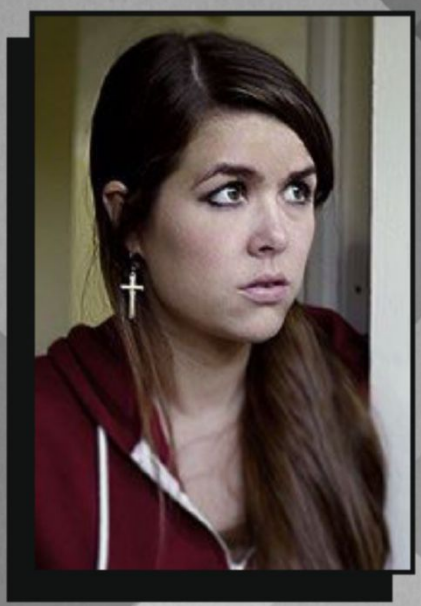
Are you intending to stay in the horror/ found footage genre for your next effort?
I'll definitely do more horror because it's such a big market and there are so many people who are willing to watch, write reviews, and blog so you can make a horror movie and it can be out there with 50 or 100 reviews very quickly whereas if you make a romcom it's not that easy, because people aren't that interested. If people trust that you can make movies for hardly any money, that's a real bonus! If we'd gone into this with £250,000 debt we'd never make any money and we'd be in debt to our investors for the rest of our lives. Some filmmakers borrow quarter of a million from a family member and they can never ever pay it back. We got £12,000 and once that's paid back, it's all gravy. So the next movie will again be a horror movie but not 'found footage', it'll be traditionally shot this time, but because of that it has to be kept quite small. If you try to make a big story with fifty or seventy thousand you're in trouble, but if you're making a one or two-person horror movie you have to make something that makes people think '*Wow, that's a bit nuts!*' You've got to try and do something which will shock. It's a terrible example because it's such a bizarre film, but *The Human Centipede* is a grim movie, but I bet it's sold a million copies because it's had so much publicity. I don't want to make just a run-of-the-mill 'nothing' horror movie, I want to try and think of something that leaves audiences going '*blimey*' - which is tough because everyone's trying to do that!

THE CUTTING ROOM is available now on DVD and VOD.









THE CUTTING ROOM

THE CUTTING ROOM / CERT: 15 / DIRECTOR & SCREENPLAY: WARREN DUDLEY / STARRING: PARRY GLASSPOOL, LUCY-JANE QUINLAN, LYDIA ORANGE, TJ HERBERT, JASON RHODES / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

If there's one thing guaranteed to bring us out in hives more at STARBURST than the prospect of another bloody American found footage cheapo straight-to-DVD horror, it's the prospect of a British found footage cheapo straight-to-DVD horror. Surely no good can come of enthusiastic, well-meaning British filmmakers with no money dabbling with the genre our American friends have already bored us to death (and beyond) with? Think again - and allow us to welcome you to *The Cutting Room* a found footage movie which confounds and bedevils our expectations and our bitter prejudices by being pretty damned good.

Three college students - Raz (Glasspool), his girlfriend Charlie (Quinlan), and their friend Jess (Orange) - are encouraged by their tutor to put together some 'special features'-type footage for their end-of-year Media Studies project. Raz, the cheeky beggar, is dissuaded from studying the phenomenon of pornography and instead the trio decide to put together an exposé of cyber-bullying, using the mystery of missing fellow students and bullying victims Rosie Clarke and Clara Jenkins as their subjects. Their investigations bring them into contact with some severely-weird individuals and, eventually, a rendezvous (at dead of night, idiots!) at a long-abandoned army barracks in some nearby forests. There, you won't be surprised to discover, something nasty awaits…

The Cutting Room is a brisk, no-nonsense effort which initially presents as just an intriguing mystery story as the trio turn detective in the wake of apparent Police disinterest in the missing girls. But there's an ever-present sense of growing ease as their investigations send them in ever more disquieting directions and the film's atmosphere becomes more stifling and uncomfortable. The unknown cast are all commendably competent (watch out for the gloriously-named Andromeda Godfrey as Charlie's mother) and their banter and relationships are hugely warm and naturalistic with the snarky Raz cast very much in the mould of Jay from *The Inbetweeners* with his one-track mind and inappropriate comments. Inevitably, the film's focus is lost towards the end as it can't help blundering headfirst into the usual clichés of the genre, with our heroes wandering around dark tunnels lit by a torch beam screaming and shouting "*Oh My God!*" at three-second intervals.

Just when it looks as if *The Cutting Room* has thrown away all the goodwill earned by its first hour with some confusing and simplistic conclusion, there's a killer twist/reveal in the final scene which will leave you gasping and reaching for the rewind button. It's always a joy when a film which seems to offer little more than an absolute waste of seventy-odd minutes of your life turns into a little gem and *The Cutting Room*, found footage from a very English perspective, suggests that there can be more to the genre than yapping High School kids lost in the forest and numbskull teams of TV reporters exploring spooky abandoned buildings where nasty things have happened. Or to put it another way, *The Cutting Room* is a cut above the rest.

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REVIEWS

THE LATEST BIG SCREEN GENRE RELEASES REVIEWED AND RATED

THE MAN FROM U.N.C.L.E.

CERT: 12A / DIRECTOR: GUY RITCHIE / SCREENPLAY: GUY RITCHIE, LIONEL WIGRAM / STARRING: HENRY CAVILL, ARMIE HAMMER, ALICIA VIKANDER, ELIZABETH DEBICKI, HUGH GRANT, JARED HARRIS / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Guy Ritchie's latest directorial effort is a suave, sparkling, sexy, '60s-set spy flick that manages to keep things interesting despite how many times the era and similar material has graced the silver screen. Bond is an obvious comparison, and a fair one seeing as Bond's creator, Ian Fleming, worked on the original 1960's US TV show, but Ritchie mixes things up enough to make U.N.C.L.E. stand on its own.

Acting as both prequel and a reboot to the TV show, the latest cinematic U.N.C.L.E. sees C.I.A. agent Napoleon Solo (Cavill) and KGB agent Illya Kuryakin (Hammer) reluctantly paired with each other by their superiors to find a missing nuclear scientist who could be the key to destabilising the fragile nuclear balance of the Cold War. Thankfully, Solo has already secured said scientist's daughter Gaby (Vikander), having spirited her out of East Germany *and* out of Illya's clutches in the opening scenes of the film, nicely setting the tone for the film; the rivalry between the two and contrasts their approach to the spy game.

Now all three must travel to Italy and use all the usual accoutrements of the spy genre to find Gaby's father and prevent Nuclear proliferation; secret cover identities; infiltration of both swanky parties and mysterious manufacturing facilities; a number of fist- and gun-fights as well as car, boat and dune buggy chases, with the two agents constantly trying to out-do each other, slowly earning each other's trust and respect along the way.

It's a testament to Ritchie's maturation as a director that such a familiar premise is delivered in such a fresh and enjoyable fashion. The action throughout is engaging, the humour nearly always hits the target and apart from a very small number of scenes that that divide the screen into multiple panels, Ritchie mostly steers clear of any of the showier tools in his director's toolbox. Much of the novelty can be attributed to the music choices, with a canny selection of era-appropriate songs that haven't yet been used in this type of film, from the likes of Roberta Flack, Nina Simone, and Ennio Morricone amongst others, working beautifully in harmony with the on screen action.

There are a few scenes where information is blatantly withheld from the audience to build suspense, only for it to be revealed a moment or two later, which do come off as a bit pointless but overall his direction is quite restrained.

Cavill and Hammer spark off each other excellently, whether arguing over women's fashion or the placement of surveillance bugs, their bickering only ever remains humorous and never becomes annoying.

He may not be as... unique an actor as Robert Vaughan, and while he doesn't do an impression of Vaughn, Cavill does effect a slightly clipped style of speech that *is* reminiscent of the previous incarnation of Solo, although sometimes it can sound more like Ed Bishop from *UFO*. Hammer easily keeps up with Cavill, however there are more drastic changes from the original to his Illya than Cavill's Solo.

Vikander gets to play much more than the standard damsel in distress here and an on-form Hugh Grant is a delight when he joins the action.

For fans of the original show, however, there are a few changes that *may* rankle. Neither agent is a member of U.N.C.L.E. at the beginning of the film. U.N.C.L.E. doesn't even exist for most of the film and most of the well known trappings from the show, like the distinctive triangular U.N.C.L.E. security clearance badges and communicator pens don't appear. Like the other successful 60's franchise reboot, *Star Trek*, the characters are also 'amped up' somewhat to appeal to modern audiences. Solo is now an ex-G.I.-turned-art-thief who is only coerced into joining the C.I.A. when facing jail time for his crimes. Kuryakin, meanwhile, has been reinvented as something of a Russian rage monster, with a troubled family past, a history of psychotic breaks and a short, explosive temper.

If you can accept these changes to the formula, and wait for the inevitable sequel, fans will surely find much to enjoy here and will probably see more elements of the show in future cinematic chapters, but for what now, this episode is one of the more enjoyable action experiences this summer. It's *certainly* the best dressed.

IAIN MCNALLY

EXPECTED 6

ACTUAL 8

FANTASTIC FOUR

CERT: 12A / DIRECTOR: JOSH TRANK / SCREENPLAY: SIMON KINBERG, JEREMY SLATER, JOSH TRANK / STARRING: MILES TELLER, MICHAEL B. JORDAN, KATE MARA, JAMIE BELL, TOBY KEBBELL, REG E. CATHEY, TIM BLAKE NELSON / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Eschewing the bright, comic book style of Tim Story's previous two *Fantastic Four* movies, director Josh Trank (Chronicle) reinvents 'Marvel's First Family' as a science adventure with more in common with '80s escapades such as Innerspace and Explorers than any of their Marvel brethren.

Trank takes the Four right back to the beginning, as Ben Grimm is intrigued by Reed Richard's claims to have built a prototype matter teleportation device. Years later, it catches the eye of a Dr. Franklin Storm (Reg E. Cathey) and his adopted daughter Sue (Mara), who inform the duo that they've actually been working on an interdimensional teleporter the whole time, something the Storms have been working on for years, but unlike Reed's device, they haven't been able to bring anything *back* from the other side.

Reed (Miles Teller) moves into the Baxter Building in New York City to work on a much bigger version of the 'quantum gate'. Soon he and Sue are joined by previous project head, Viktor Von Dom (Kebbell) and Franklin's 'hot-headed' son who is *also* a "hot-shot" mechanical engineer, Johnny Storm (Jordan).

Trank has attempted a more realistic version of Lee and Kirby's scientific adventurers whilst trying to keep some of the light tone of the original comics. Once they undergo their various transformations, things get *very* dark for a while; but the film does take it's time getting to those scenes, preferring to build the characters and their relationships before putting them to the test. And put to the test they are, with a time jump of a year, during which some of the characters end up working for the military whilst others are separated from the main group, allowing tensions to simmer right until the point that they all need to pull together to combat an incredibly powerful Dr. Doom.

Ben Grimm suffers the worse of the Four, and Trank focuses on this and how it affects Reed's relationship with his friend; over any romantic subplot with Sue, surprisingly, and while it's unclear how much of The Thing is Bell's performance, the tragedy of the character is very well expressed.

Whilst all the character building comes at the cost of a slightly rushed climax, there's a solid basis here for future movies, *if* audiences can get on board with a more toned-down Fantastic Four. Trank's path, whilst certainly different, could be an intriguing one to follow.

IAIN MCNALLY

EXPECTED 5
ACTUAL 8

MISSION: IMPOSSIBLE - ROGUE NATION

CERT: 12A / DIRECTOR & SCREENPLAY: CHRISTOPHER MCQUARRIE / STARRING: TOM CRUISE, SIMON PEGG, REBECCA FERGUSON, JEREMY RENNER, VING RHAMES, SEAN HARRIS, ALEC BALDWIN, TOM HOLLANDER / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Much-anticipated sequel Rogue Nation not only doesn't reach the giddy heights of its predecessor but actually doesn't seem particularly inclined to try. It has its bravura action scenes, of course, but this is a markedly different kind of movie. This is a Mission Impossible film with both brains and balls.

Ethan Hunt and his impossible chums are up their neck in it again as it all kicks off. The Cruise-hanging-from-a-plane sequence is merely your pre-credits teaser before we plunge into the meat of a story that sees the Impossible Mission Force (IMF) disbanded following a Government enquiry in the wake of the mayhem caused by Hunt and co. But CIA time-server Alan Hunley (Baldwin) is frustrated by the fact that while he is able to absorb the rest of the IMF team into his organisation, Ethan Hunt's still on the loose and on the trail of The Syndicate, a terrorist group no-one seems to believe actually exists. But exist they do – they're described at one point as "an anti-IMF" - headed up by the urbane, chilling and softly-spoken Soloman Lane (Harris), they're determined to destabilise the world's economy through a series of apparently-random terrorist atrocities.

McQuarrie has created a clever, witty, exciting modern espionage thriller which not only pays its dues to the earlier titles in the series, but also tacitly acknowledges that Ethan himself is starting to get a little long in the tooth. The IMF is seen as outdated and prehistoric and Ethan too is struggling to stay the distance. Frustrated and outwitted by his opponent at every turn, Ethan still takes his lumps and bumps and throws himself recklessly into danger for the greater good but he's starting to suffer. Punch-ups leave him dazed, he looks shell-shocked as he hurls himself through windows and he sails closer to death than ever before when an underwater exploit doesn't go quite as planned.

Rogue Nation is never less than electrifying entertainment, but some may be disappointed that the adrenalin rush isn't quite as marked and that the emphasis here is on a compelling and multi-layered story rather than just a succession of outlandish stunts. The final confrontation between Hunt and Lane is a slight damp squib and parts of the third arc stumble close to the absurd. But these are really minor quibbles in a proud, funny, gutsy and intelligent action film comfortable in its own skin and made with style, conviction and a refreshing determination not to rest on the laurels of former glories and do something a little bit different and unexpected. Rogue Nation is a Cruise-missile of a movie.

PAUL MOUNT

EXPECTED 10
ACTUAL 9

REVIEWS

THE LATEST HOME VIDEO RELEASES REVIEWED AND RATED

BAIT

DVD / CERT: 18 / DIRECTOR: DOMINIC BRUNT / SCREENPLAY: PAUL ROUNDELL / STARRING: VICTORIA SMURFITT, JOANNE MITCHELL, JONATHAN SLINGER, RULA LENSKA / RELEASE DATE: SEPTEMBER 7TH

'Difficult second album' time for Dominic "Paddy off Emmerdale" Brunt as he follows up his extraordinary directorial debut, 2012's intimate-yet-terrifying 'zombie' drama Before Dawn, with a movie which, superficially, couldn't be more different. Yet dig a little deeper – watch out for zombies! – and you'll find that Before Dawn and Bait have much more in common than might be initially apparent. Both films feature two people battling against a formidable, implacable and impossibly hostile adversary; Before Dawn's zombies are replaced here with monsters which are much more shocking, much more threatening and, ultimately, much more real. Welcome to the murky, grimy, bloody underworld of ruthless debt collectors – and a story of what two desperate woman are driven to when they're pushed too far.

Both films establish that one of the signatures of Dominic Brunt movies is a desire to set up extraordinary situations populated by believable, realistic people speaking and behaving the way real people do. Paul Roundell's tight script deftly establishes the flighty Bex (Victoria Smurfitt) and the more restrained Dawn (Joanne Mitchell) in bold strokes and with snappy, naturalistic dialogue and character quirks which instantly endear them to the audience. Desperate to better themselves, the girls allow the oily, plausible Jeremy into their lives and it's only when he offers to loan them the cash they need to set up their own little cafe that they realise he's actually a loan shark with a neat line in astronomical interest rates for his customers. The girls try to back out of the deal but it's too late; Jeremy imposes an 'arrangement fee' which is itself more than the amount he's loaned them. The girls are soon up to their necks in debt and trouble – and Jeremy and his silent heavy Si won't take no for an answer as they impose their own enforcement rules on their hapless victims.

Bait can be a difficult film to watch. Sequences of pensioners being brutalised are disturbing and upsetting albeit necessary to establish just how appalling these creatures really are. When Jeremy is finally revealed in his true colours, the violence escalates to a degree and a scale which come pretty close to Grand Guignol; Dawn and Bex finally decide to fight back after being humiliated and brutalised and the results are extraordinary touching on the surreal.

Bait might not have quite the same impact as its predecessor (which might well be just because Before Dawn came right out of left field, unexpected and without fanfare) but it's a haunting and memorable movie in its own right and it will stay with you long after it's finished. The second half seems a little frenetic and episodic where we might have wanted to spend a bit more quality time with Bex, Dawn and Co. but once the situation is set up there's no time to waste in small talk and as we reach the climax the tension is pretty near unbearable. Bait (retitled from the original The Taking) is a worthy, possibly more challenging piece than Before Dawn and it cements Dominic Brunt's growing confidence as an ambitious film maker with the ability to tell strong stories with power, grace and economy.

PAUL MOUNT

++++++++++ 8

STALAG 17 (1953)

BD / CERT: PG / DIRECTOR: BILLY WILDER / SCREENPLAY: BILLY WILDER, EDWIN BLUM / STARRING: WILLIAM HOLDEN, DON TAYLOR, OTTO PREMINGER, ROBERT STRAUSS, HARVEY LEMBECK, PETER GRAVES, SIG RUMAN, NEVILLE BRAND RICHARD ERDMAN / RELEASED: OUT NOW

Those of you of a certain age will remember that a '70s Sunday afternoon consisted of sitting on a turquoise plastic sofa round your gran's watching Prisoner of War flicks while older generations argued politics in the kitchen next door. After all, grandad was a staunch trade unionist and could never get over his daughter marrying a Tory [*think we just veered into the autobiographical there* – Ed]. Oh, right. Sorry about that. But you do remember those movies don't you? Both the Brits and Hollywood knocked out shedloads during a '50s golden age until reaching a sort of big-budget nirvana with The Great Escape (1963) and a bizarre last hurrah with Escape to Victory (1981). There was just something about the formula of defiant allied soldiers getting one over on (often comic) Nazis that never failed. With lots of room for an array of disparate characters thrown together in the relatively-cheap-to-film confines of a prison camp, the attraction was easy to see. Hollywood's first crack at the genre was Stalag 17 (1953) and it very nearly didn't get released. Paramount, in their infinite wisdom, thought nobody would want to see a film about POWs. Presumably the Brit's The Wooden Horse (1950) had passed them by, but in the end they went for it and got themselves a hit and an Academy Award for William Holden. Now we've got the Blu-ray, so how does it fare today?

The story is a good one: the American inmates of Barracks 4 don't seem to be having much luck with their escape attempts. Are they jinxed? Or is there an informer in their midst? The cynical operator Sefton (William Holden) seems the most likely culprit but it wouldn't be too much of a spoiler to say he's just way too obvious. When an officer (Don Taylor) is temporarily billeted with them he says a bit too much about his pre-capture Nazi-sabotaging exploits. He's soon in the Commandant's (Otto Preminger) office and about to be handed over to the Gestapo who will most certainly shoot him. Can the plucky POWs get him out? Or will they be undone by that spy?

The first thing you notice about Stalag 17 is that today it seems inappropriately light-hearted. This is a movie that sees two airmen mercilessly machine-gunned in the opening minutes so the comedy-relief and whacky antics of the brilliant Richard Strauss and Harvey Lembeck seem incongruous to say the least. But when the war was a recent memory, humour was actually commonplace in this sort of fare, and comedic-yet-ruthless Nazis were strangely ubiquitous. Nevertheless, Billy Wilder's script seems as sharp as ever and Holden's performance as the anti-heroic Sefton is still pitch-perfect. The *whodunit?* element of the story works brilliantly while at the same time, it cleverly juxtaposes cynicism with heroism and is as satisfying as it was the first time we saw it.

Needless to say, the monochrome is wonderful on Blu-ray because monochrome is always wonderful on Blu-ray.

Extras: *Interview with film scholar Neil Sinyard / Trailer / 36-page booklet*

JOHN KNOTT

9

MUNSTER, GO HOME! (1966)

DVD / CERT: U / DIRECTOR: EARL BELLAMY / SCREENPLAY: JOE CONNELLY, BOB MOSHER, GEORGE TIBBLES / STARRING: FRED GWYNNE, YVONNE DE CARLO, AL LEWIS, BUTCH PATRICK, DEBBIE WATSON / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

As The Munsters came to the end of their TV run in 1966, just before the sets were demolished and the cast went their separate ways, the decision was taken to produce a film for theatrical release, and it's finally available on DVD!

Herman Munster (Fred Gwynne) inherits the title of Lord Munster along with Munster Hall, a stately home in England. So it's off to Britain they go, leaving Spot (the unseen pet dragon) to guard 1313 Mockingbird Lane.

Of course, there are some typical Munster sight gags, puns and misunderstandings on board the steamer across the Atlantic, but the real fun starts when they arrive at their ancestral inheritance and meet the British side of the Munster clan.

The UK Munsters are a family of homicidal psychopaths, jealous of their American cousins and determined to frighten them back to the colonies. And if *that* doesn't work, there's the mysterious Gryphon who runs a counterfeiting ring who'll make sure that Freddie Munster (Terry-Thomas, playing a cad, bounder and through-and-through rotter as usual) gets his inheritance by any foul means necessary in a cross-country car race.

The script is very much an elongated episode of the TV series, only in full colour – with some subtle changes to the make-up, particularly Grandpa Munster (Al Lewis), to accommodate the bigger screen. Though it's a novelty to see the family in colour for the first time, we can't help wondering if the original monochrome serves the characters better as a reminder of the old black and white films that inspired them.

The regular cast are all back in their familiar roles, with the exception of a mysteriously recast Marilyn Munster with Debbie Watson replacing series regular Pat Priest. The double act of Fred Gwynne and Al Lewis is a comedic delight. Joining Terry-Thomas is Hermione Gingold as Lady Effigie Munster (the matriarch of the English Munsters), with John Carradine as Cruikshank the butler.

Fans of the series will love the opportunity to see this on DVD for the first time.

ROBIN PIERCE

8

INFERNAL

DVD / CERT: 15 / DIRECTOR & SCREENPLAY: BRYAN COYNE / STARRING: ANDY OSTROFF, HEATHER ADAIR, ALYSSA KOERNER, JOSE ROSETE / RELEASE DATE: AUGUST 24TH

Infernal, from writer and director Bryan Coyne, draws a mix of reactions whilst viewing. There are moments of inspiration, when an inherent creepiness seems to seep like a mist out of the screen, chilling you in your seat. There are also times when the only response, reluctant yet tangible, is a knowing chuckle. A mixed bag indeed.

Nathan (Ostroff) and Sophia (Adair) are a couple with some initial underlying issues. The first time we meet them, Sophia is trying to find the correct words to explain to a partner she seems to have a lack of faith in that she is pregnant. This unplanned family development means she needs to get married in accordance with her religious upbringing and strong beliefs. Nathan, while struggling for the words to express his true feelings (and we can all guess what they are), complies and proposes with as much insincere romance as he can muster.

Fast forward a few years, via a slightly awkward wedding and a volatile birth, and the unhappy couple have Imogene (Koerner), a child lovingly described repeatedly by her mother as "broken" and who seems to be experiencing some form of unexplained supernatural influence which threatens to destroy the family completely.

On the plus side, Infernal is a film of interesting observational complexity built around a dysfunctional young couple whose decaying and destructive relationship contrasts harshly against the curious and lovingly burgeoning one their daughter is experiencing with forces unknown. As Nathan and Sophia struggle to find an agreed way to raise their daughter, and deal with the issues she is clearly suffering from, they focus less and less on the most important things in front of them and descend into expletive-fuelled aggression with increased regularity. These moments are harshly realistic and uncomfortable to observe, and there is an unavoidable, slowly germinating sense of dread that is palpable as you sense unfortunate events are just around the corner.

This unease is partly down to the growing relationship that Imogene is developing with the monster in her closet (literally). Children are always creepy in films of this nature, something of an open goal if you will, and, while Infernal is no different in this respect, Koerner is superb as a child with a confused sense of reliance, influenced by something she doesn't understand. The starkness of her relationship with her parents is reflected in the protectiveness of her unnatural one, and this new dependence leads latterly to moments of extreme violence and brutality.

There are problems, though. The found footage premise that Coyne has chosen never really convinces, drawing stylistically from both the fixed camera style of the Paranormal Activity franchise and also the nausea inducing shaky-cam from countless other films in the genre. The flaws are prominent in that there seems to be an abundance of static cameras that are recording everything, yet nothing is being watched, and the shaky-cam is so shaky at times as to be unwatchable. There are also moments of outright preposterousness that don't fit with the Poltegeist-esque tone of the rest of the film and serve no purpose other than to distance the viewer from the story.

Performance-wise, the strength of Koerner's depiction of a troubled and misunderstood child embarrasses some of those around her, with many of the supporting cast slipping into easy and lazy stereotypes. It's not that they're necessarily bad; it's just that they're not good enough.

Infernal is a decent film that suffers from too much ambition. Coyne's understanding of the horror genre is clear and there are knowing references a-plenty, but his bold concept needed greater refinement and softness of touch to fulfil its clear promise. There is a genuinely scary and chilling film at the heart of Infernal just trying to get out. The shame is that it doesn't quite succeed.

JOHN TOWNSEND

5

THE FALLING

DVD + BD / CERT: 15 / DIRECTOR & SCREENPLAY: CAROL MORLEY / STARRING: MAISIE WILLIAMS, MAXINE PEAKE, FLORENCE PUGH, ANNA BURNETT, GRETA SCACCHI / RELEASE DATE: AUGUST 24TH

Growing up is hard. We know, this isn't new information. If you haven't been through your teenage years yet you've almost certainly seen someone else go through them in cinema. Coming of age has been a tried and tested theme ever since humans first began telling stories, and the British drama The Falling is no exception.

Maisie Williams (best known for TV's Game of Thrones) stars in this low-key, low-budget story of a 1960s-era all-girl English boarding school. When tragedy besets the school, it finds itself in the grip of hysteria that manifests as a mysterious fainting epidemic. Along the way, its medley of awkward female teenage characters fumble through their friendships, parental relationships and sexual encounters, not unlike an (extremely well-written) episode of Grange Hill.

But what makes The Falling stand out from other teen dramas is the hauntingly beautiful way in which adolescence is explored. Its deceptively simple narrative is imbued with layers of subtext, hidden imagery and meaning that even the most perceptive of audiences would be hard-pressed to pick up on first viewing. The soft light, dreamy camera movements and almost subliminal flashes of previous scenes and images wrap the film up in a surreal, ghostly atmosphere. It's compelling, to say the least, and although plot threads are largely tied together in the third act this is an experience of tone and feeling more than narrative strength. Inspiration is drawn less from Mean Girls and more from Picnic at Hanging Rock, with the haunting music even conjuring memories of those famous pan pipes in Peter Weir's Australian classic.

Strong performances from a hugely talented cast, guided by the confident hands of director Carol Morley, make this a fascinating watch. Although the eerie, particular atmosphere and tone might be jarring for some, it's a refreshing change from the formulaic American culture to which we are hugely overexposed. For a wholly unique experience, you can't go far wrong with The Falling.

THOMAS WINWARD

8

ALICE IN WONDERLAND (1999)

DVD / CERT: U / DIRECTOR: NICK WILLING / SCREENPLAY: PETER BARNES / STARRING: TINA MAJORINO, MARTIN SHORT, MIRANDA RICHARDSON, CHRISTOPHER LLOYD, WHOOPI GOLDBERG, BEN KINGSLEY, GENE WILDER / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

There is something eternally enthralling about Alice in Wonderland, or Alice's Adventures in Wonderland, to give Lewis Carroll's seminal work its proper title. Since the first adaptation appeared in 1903, there have been more than 40 films and television programmes based on this most renowned example of "literary nonsense", and now Nick Willing's star-studded 1999 version is getting a new DVD release.

Watched in one sitting this film feels a little drawn out and at 150 minutes it does require a certain commitment, but apart from some changes to the central narrative it is a reasonably faithful adaptation. Willing has successfully captured the bizarreness of Carroll's tale of a young girl disappearing down a rabbit hole into a world created by her own dreams, and one populated by some of most memorable characters in literature. Original themes remain, and there is the added sub-plot of Alice needing to find the courage and confidence to perform in public, and it is hard to imagine fans of the source material finding too much fault.

As with any version though, the performances are everything. Martin Short's wonderfully "mad" Mad Hatter and Miranda Richardson's Queen of Hearts (think of her Queen Elizabeth I from Blackadder turned up a few notches on the madness scale with added shrieking) are the standouts in a cast full of surprises that keep the familiar story entertaining. Around every corner lurks another big name, with Jason Flemyng virtually unrecognisable as Jack and Whoopi Goldberg intermittently grinning her way through the film as the slightly peripheral Cheshire Cat.

Given the film's initial home on television, and the chapter definition of the book, it is perhaps understandable there is a slightly episodic feel to the film. Unavoidably, it exists as a series of madcap comedy skits linked together by quieter, more thoughtful interludes, but this somehow enhances the story, as Alice slowly learns something different from each of her encounters.

Much of the fun in the film comes from the work of Jim Henson's Creature Shop, for which it won one of four Emmy Awards at the time of release. The mix of puppetry, live-action and special effects is hugely nostalgic in an age when a reliance on CGI dominates filmmaking, and children perhaps more than adults will find the superbly designed creatures both fascinating and engaging.

One thing is for certain; this version of Alice in Wonderland is less divisive than Tim Burton's hugely successful yet widely criticised interpretation. There really is nothing not to like here, but it would be recommended to watch this film as it was originally intended: as a mini-series. 150 minutes is a long time to spend in Wonderland in one go.

JOHN TOWNSEND

7

THE ADVENTURES OF BUCKAROO BANZAI ACROSS THE 8TH DIMENSION (1984)

BD / CERT: 12 / DIRECTOR: W.D. RICHTER / SCREENPLAY: EARL MAC RAUCH / STARRING: PETER WELLER, JOHN LITHGOW, ELLEN BARKIN, JEFF GOLDBLUM, CHRISTOPHER LLOYD / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Dr Buckaroo Banzai (Peter Weller) is a neuro-surgeon, a physicist, a test pilot and a rock star. He can pretty much excel at anything he puts his mind to. While driving his test car – a pickup truck, no less – past the speed of sound, Banzai manages to reach the 8th Dimension whilst literally driving through a mountain of rocks. On his return, he finds that he has brought something back with him.

Hearing of his success, Dr Emilio Lizardo (John Lithgow) breaks out of his prison for the criminally insane and decides to kidnap an old colleague who tried to help him do something similar in 1938, only for Lizardo to be taken over by a being from that other dimension called Lord John Whorfin who now wants to go back home. These beings are called Red Lectroids and arrived on Earth in 1938, using the broadcast of War of the Worlds as their cover.

The aliens now hide in plain sight, pretending to be humans, but Banzai can see them thanks to an electric shock given to him by the visiting Black Lectroids, who are here to help stop the Reds. With the help of his band (among other roles they undertake) the Hong Kong Cavaliers, Banzai saves the day and his new squeeze, Penny Priddy (Ellen Barkin), who just so happens to be the long lost twin sister of his dead wife. With us so far? Good, because that isn't even the half of it.

The word 'cult' is overused when it comes to films that come out of left field, and this one certainly does that. You'll honestly finish watching the film wondering what the hell you just saw. Fortunately, the extras include interviews with some of the cast as well as the director who, both in 1984 and present day, admit that they have no real idea what is going on either! They have an idea how to categorise it into a specific genre and there was clearly a plan to turn this into a franchise, with the credits promising another adventure against the World Crime League which never materialised. It's as if someone took the ideas for at least three different films and stuck them into a blender to see what came out the other side. Richter even to this day states that the film couldn't be made without the assistance of the Banzai Corporation, as if Buckaroo himself were a real person. It all ends up as a bit of a mess.

It's so difficult to score this review. Is it entertaining? That's down to the individual to decide, but we can definitely say it's an interesting and strange experience. And after all, isn't that what cult movies are: enigmas?

Extras: *Audio commentary / New interviews with Peter Weller and John Lithgow / Three featurettes / Alternative opening and closing / Deleted scenes / Trailers / Gallery / Collector's booklet*

JD GILLAM

6

THUNDERBIRDS ARE GO (1966)

BD / CERT U / DIRECTOR: DAVID LANE / SCREENPLAY: GERRY ANDERSON, SYLVIA ANDERSON / STARRING: SHANE RIMMER, PETER DYNELEY, MATT ZIMMERMAN, SYLVIA ANDERSON, JEREMY WILKIN, DAVID GRAHAM, CHARLES TINGWELL, BOB MONKHOUSE / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Box office expectations were understandably high for the first feature film spin-off from the legendary Thunderbirds TV series when it was released in a blaze of publicity in 1966. Producer/writer Gerry Anderson was left to ponder whether the film would simply gross as much as a typical Bond movie or possibly even more. In the end, audiences stayed away in droves - it's suggested that 1960s TV audiences couldn't see the point in paying good money to see a film version of something they could see on the television (the fools!) and the film played to largely empty cinemas.

Yet over the years, Thunderbirds Are GO (the name's so good they 'borrowed' it for the new CGI TV reboot) has been largely rehabilitated and warmly welcomed into the Anderson fold, albeit accepted as a curious misstep in the then ever-upward trajectory of Gerry and Sylvia Anderson and Century 21 Productions. The film looks stunning on Blu-ray; the colour palette is beyond vivid and whilst the crystal clarity of the picture does the big-headed marionettes few favours, the gorgeously-detailed model work of Anderson regular Derek Meddings is still breath-taking and a reminder that, however big and clever CGI may be, it really ain't as good as practical miniature effects and probably never will be.

But as a film, Thunderbirds Are GO is a little... well, dull. Of course, it ticks all the boxes that made the TV show's fifty-minute episodes so thrilling and a bigger budget allows for bigger set-pieces - but the story moves at what can only generously be described as a snail's pace and there are outrageous moments of padding - that's you, Cliff Richard Junior (ahem) and the Shadows performing live at the 'Shooting Star' nightclub in a tortuous dream sequence - which must have utterly bored and bewildered 1960's nippers. The story itself is suitably epic; the Zero X manned space mission to Mars is sabotaged by International Rescue's old enemy The Hood (for reasons which are never explained). Two years later, a second mission is launched and another sabotage attempt is foiled by International Rescue, who have pitched up to supervise the launch. After an encounter with spark-belching rock snakes on the surface of Mars (the film's most exciting sequence), the exploration mission is aborted and Zero X heads for home. But disaster strikes as the massive craft prepares for landing; can International Rescue save the day, the astronauts and the hastily-evacuated town of Craigsville which lies directly in the plummeting craft's path? What do you think? (Actually, Craigsville gets trashed...)

Fans of the new incarnation of Thunderbirds will find this desperately slow and humourless. The initial Zero X launch sequence, with the rocket being assembled, rolling out across the airfield, the astronauts moving into position, takes up the entire running time of one helter-skelter episode of the new TV series. The pace never really picks up across the film's ninety minutes and the story is so linear you could use it as a runway. Yet despite its faults, Thunderbirds Are GO is still a charming period piece best appreciated by those who enjoyed the Thunderbirds phenomenon the first time around and who can forgive its thunderingly lumbering story and naïve characterisation. Certainly, it's never looked better than on this new Blu-ray and there's a decent grab-bag of new and vintage special features (some ported over from earlier DVD releases) to guarantee a fully superannuated supermarionation experience.

Extras: *Sylvia Anderson/ David Lane commentary, UK and US trailers, Countdown to Thunderbirds (new), Entertainment Is Go (new), Cliff Richard Jr. and the Shadows unseen test footage, History and Appeal, Factory of Dolls and Rockets, Epics in Miniature, Come With me To The Rushes, What Does FAB mean, gallery, isolated music track.*

PAUL MOUNT

7

WILLIAM SHATNER PRESENTS: CHAOS ON THE BRIDGE

VOD / CERT: 15 / DIRECTOR & SCREENPLAY: WILLIAM SHATNER / STARRING: WILLIAM SHATNER, DENISE CROSBY, JOHN DE LANCIE, JONATHAN FRAKES, PATRICK STEWART / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

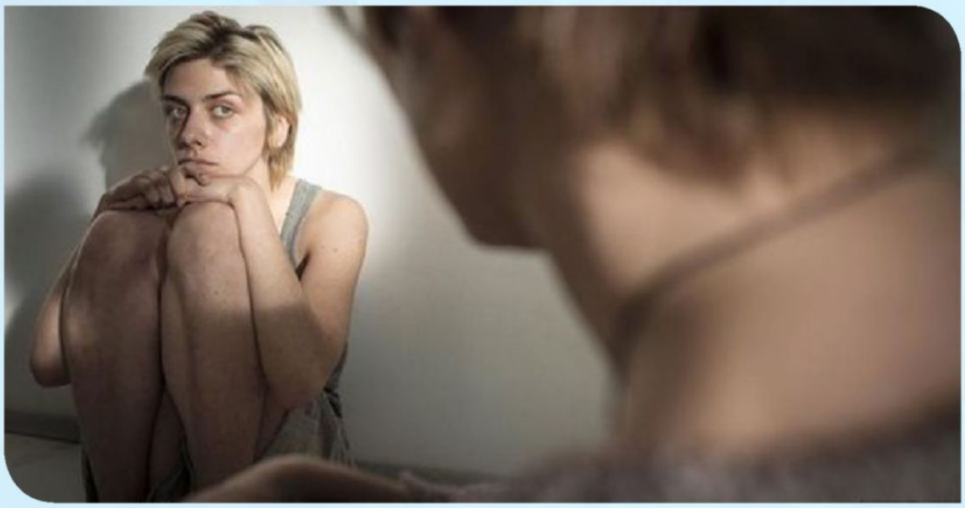
A Shatner-led documentary telling the tale of the tumultuous time spent trying to get Star Trek: The Next Generation off the ground. A cheery, gossipy little number made even more enjoyable by the ruddy-cheeked presence of Shatner himself, who gets plenty of face time out of the gig. This is no mere voiceover. Things we also know: that Trek creator Gene Roddenberry, genius as he may have been, was hardly the easiest person in the world to work with. Chaos on the Bridge deals with the specifics, delving into the nitty-gritty minutiae of the bickering which went on behind the scenes of The Next Generation. Even better, familiar faces such as Patrick Stewart, Jonathan Frakes and Gates McFadden all show up to testify as to how difficult things were at the time. Favourite story to come out of Chaos on the Bridge: that before Roddenberry would even let Stewart read for the part of Captain Picard, he insisted he wear a wig – and that poor Stewart had to have the thing Fed-Ex'd over from England 'specially. How did Picard wind up bald, then? "Hair doesn't mean anything in the 25th Century."

Other, more well-documented events covered include the hasty exit of Tasha Yar (Crosby revealing that the cast had to steal food from the set of Cheers, so penny-pinching was the production) and the replacement of Dr. Crusher with the less popular Dr. Pulaski (better actress, but no chemistry whatsoever with the crew). That everyone from the production team to the writers and cast seem to remember events slightly differently puts an interesting spin on things, even if there is a slightly bitchy tone to the documentary as a whole (from the production team, anyway – the likes of Stewart and Frakes are delightfully cheery and frank).

It's no surprise, then, that the first two series of The Next Generation wound up (and I say this with love, as a fan) a patchy affair, to put it mildly. Thankfully, from these first faltering steps did emerge one of sci-fi television's best series of all time and a worthy successor to Star Trek. And now, all these years after the fact, we've got a pretty good documentary out of it all too.

JOEL HARLEY

7



BODY

DVD / CERT: 15 / DIRECTOR & SCREENPLAY: DAN BERK, ROBERT OLSEN / STARRING: HELEN ROGERS, ALEXANDRA TURSHEN, LAUREN MOLINA, LARRY FESSENDEN / RELEASE DATE: AUGUST 31ST

Bored, drunk and stoned during the festive period, three young women break into an empty mansion for a little booze-and-pot-themed fun. Things inevitably turn south when the groundskeeper interrupts the girls' little party, inadvertently turning the whole affair into a Christmas nightmare. Suddenly, there's a body to be disposed of and things just keep on getting worse...

A dark thriller in the Shallow Grave vein, Body keeps a tight rein on its small cast and simple story, letting its strong performers and sharp writing do most of the hard work. It opens disarmingly funny, with a game of Scrabble and an embarrassing dad wearing sunglasses indoors. It doesn't stay that way though; like the underrated Stuart Gordon feature Stuck, the film reaches some surprisingly dark places at times, particularly as the film and its characters first begin to make their modus operandi known.

To say much more would be to spoil the surprises of a well-crafted, intelligent little psychological thriller with more than a few tricks up its sleeve. Helen Rogers, Alexandra Turshen and Lauren Molina carry their roles well, being sympathetic and likeable for the most part... until it's time for one of them to not be. Caught in the middle of all this, Larry Fessenden does well with not a lot, letting the women tackle most of the heavy lifting and brutal in-fighting.

The story goes dark and tends to stay there, but there's always a sense that it could go further and be more unpredictable, if it really wanted to. That sense of restraint holds Body back from greatness, its moments of true darkness making its relative predictability elsewhere feel all the more disappointing. As oh-shit-there's-a-dead-body movies go, it's fine – it could just do with a bit more meat on its bones, is all.

JOEL HARLEY

7

THE TOWN THAT DREADED SUNDOWN (1976)

DVD & BD / CERT: 15 / DIRECTOR: CHARLES B. PIERCE / SCREENPLAY: EARL E. SMITH / STARRING: BEN JOHNSON, ANDREW PRINE, DAWN WELLS, JIMMY CLEM / RELEASE DATE: AUGUST 24TH

One of the final scenes in The Town That Dreaded Sundown shows a queue building outside a movie theatre showing The Town That Dreaded Sundown. This meta conclusion to what is a part-documentary, part-dramatic reconstruction of supposed real events leaves you in a mood of frustrated disappointment, but it does somehow underline much of what you may have suspected while watching.

The real events that this film concerns itself with are several unsolved murders and attacks that took place in the small Arkansas town of Texarkana that became known as The Moonlight Murders. As the local force struggles to gain a foothold in the investigation and with any leads drying up, a revered Texas Ranger is called in to assist. With the names of those involved changed, and actual case details clearly scarce, writer Earl E. Smith and director Charles B. Pierce had plenty of scope for narrative indulgence; to build tension and develop the characters. Sadly, what they created is wearily formulaic, full of characters comparable in incompetence to Sheriff J.W. Pepper and worst of all, just rather dull.

If you are a fan of close-up shots of sinister, booted feet or of police cars screeching repetitively around country roads, then Sundown may well be your kind of film. Any mystery is dispensed with early on due to the knowledge that the killer is never caught, and apart from some blunt wordplay which vaguely implies a suspect, there is little thought given by the filmmakers to a part of the story you would think important. What remains is a disjointed number of set pieces as the police incompetently hunt their masked prey and succeed only in distancing the audience.

Pierce attempts to weave his stop/start narrative together with an off-camera voiceover designed to give the film a real-life documentary style. While this exposition does assist the viewer with the timeline and who's who, it adds nothing to the plot and gives the film an amateurish quality that may actually be intentional, but likely isn't. Sundown does appear cheap throughout from the pop-up, cardboard-like sets to the random variations in lighting as night becomes day, then becomes night again in no time at all. Everything has the impression of either being rushed or not thought through, and as such the film never fully engages the viewer.

There is a certain nostalgia to The Town That Dreaded Sundown, but this isn't enough in itself to warrant more than a passing interest. That it developed a cult status in the '80s is likely down to a lack of availability leading to people's heightened, rose-tinted memories and a subsequent false demand rather than anything within the film itself. A production that is as confused and confusing as the mystery it tries to document.

JOHN TOWNSEND

5

JORDSKOTT

DVD / CERT: 15 / DIRECTOR: HENRIK BJÖRN, ANDERS ENGSTRÖM / SCREENPLAY: DENNIS MAGNUSSON, FREDRIK T. OLSSON, ALEXANDER KANTSJÖ / STARRING: MOA GAMMEL, GÖRAN RAGNERSTAM, RICHARD FORSGREN / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Given a superficial glance, this Swedish ten-part drama is little more than another slick crime thriller from the recent stable of gritty 'nordic-noir' that has brought us the likes of Borgen and The Killing; and so it was billed in TV listings when it premièred in the UK on ITV Encore a couple of months ago, giving little away as to the true nature of this unique and compelling genre mash-up.

The opening scenes introduce our main protagonist Eva Thörnblad, a police detective tormented by the disappearance, presumed drowning, of her daughter seven years ago. Eva's played hauntingly by Mao Gammel, whose performance, like the rest of the cast, has a sincerity and gravitas in keeping with the programme's solemn themes and gives the whole thing a naturalistic feel, making the later twists and developments all the more surprising. Early on in the story, Eva has cause to return to her childhood home to deal with the estate of her recently deceased father, from whom she became estranged after her tragic loss. It is here, in the town of Silverhöjd and its mysterious surrounding forests, that the rest of the drama plays out and where things get very interesting.

By the end of the first episode, it becomes clear that this is a singularly remarkable debut from creator Henrik Björn, who has taken the conventional bleak crime drama format that the Scandinavians do so well and infused it with magic and mystery, drawing on a wealth of Norse mythology and folklore while at the same time managing to keep it engaging and plausible. We have corrupt businesses plotting grand conspiracies here and a cat and mouse chase with a sinister killer there – ancient secrets and mysterious characters abound with echoes of David Lynch; the whole thing is very reminiscent of The X-Files at its dark, brooding best.

One of the most endearing things about Jordskott is how all the revelations and surprises are directed with an underplayed subtlety, so that the story never descends into ridiculous fantasy while at the same time offering enough to elevate it above other, more conventional, shows. The editing is, at times, a bit too snappy – jumping from one scene to another like an impatient child - but at least Björn could never be accused of resorting to the kind of clumsy plot explanation devices so often employed in, for example, American dramas so that the viewer is compelled to keep their eyes on the screen and their brains in gear.

All told, from its beautifully rendered opening titles to the satisfying conclusion, Jordskott is ten hours of fantastic drama that you won't want to miss.

SIMON BESSON

9

HUMANS

DVD / CERT: 15 / DIRECTOR: VARIOUS / SCREENPLAY: SAM VINCENT, JONATHAN BRACKLEY / STARRING: KATHERINE PARKINSON, COLIN MORGAN, GEMMA CHAN, WILLIAM HURT, DANNY WEBB / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

The topic of AI isn't exactly new to science fiction (as a coffee break game, try to count how many times it's appeared in recent films and TV). But Channel 4's Humans has an intriguing approach to the subject – following various characters in a parallel 2015 in which household androids are commonplace – which works extremely well because, importantly, it feels not too distant from reality.

In a world in which we commonly hear about industries replacing workers with mechanised processes (Ocado recently announced plans to introduce robot engineers to its warehouses, for example), and in which household gadgets are becoming ever more complex, Humans plays on genuine fears of what further rapid developments could lead to.

We're introduced to Humans' London through the Hawkins family, who purchase "synth" Anita (Chan) to help out around the house. But mum Laura (Parkinson) grows distrustful of Anita's relationship with the kids, and the family's lives begin to spiral further out of control due to the gradual dawning that Anita is no ordinary synth but is able to consciously think and feel.

Meanwhile, fugitive Leo (Morgan) and a gang of synths are searching for Anita, having known her in a past life, and are themselves hunted by government scientist Hobb (Webb). And this all somehow links to Dr. George Millican (Hurt), a retired scientist who clings on to his malfunctioning synth against the wishes of a stern NHS-provided synth nurse.

It's a lot to take in, and Humans does juggle a lot of characters, but on the whole, it does so effectively. The domestic drama gives us a relatable in-point to the world. Leo's more thriller-esque story provides excitement, even if the action sequences are short and unflashy. And Dr. Millican's story of old age and grief has some of the series' most touching dialogue. All of these strands come together effectively to explore the series' themes and ask very important questions about, for example, the way we treat those different to us and whether technology is dehumanising society.

If there's one thing to criticise, it's that certain strands of the domestic drama don't work as well as others, particularly the withholding of information about Laura's past – early on, we learn that she has a big secret, but the reveal is dragged out, and when it does come, feels largely irrelevant to the story Humans is trying to tell.

But despite occasional flagging, Humans manages to tap into current issues and extrapolate them into eerie, fascinating sci-fi, giving us compelling domestic drama and character-driven thrills. Its finale ties the story up satisfyingly while leaving threads hanging for the recently commissioned second series, which can't come soon enough.

Extras: *BTS Featurettes*

KIERON MOORE

8

RIKI-OH: THE STORY OF RICKY (1991)

BD / CERT: 18 / DIRECTOR & SCREENPLAY: NGAI CHOI LAM (SIMON NAM) / STARRING: SIU-WONG FAN, MEI SHENG FAN, KA-KUI HO / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Riki-Oh, what a time we live in. In an age where every old cult genre movie is getting a special edition Blu-ray re-release with all of the trimmings, The Most Insane Prison Movie Ever Made finally gets its shiny upgrade.

Dropped in a prison full of sadistic governors, wardens and inmates, buff superman Riki (Fan) is systematically tortured and abused by a series of ever-worsening antagonists. Thankfully, Riki himself is no defenceless Tobias Beecher – indeed, to paraphrase Watchmen's Rorschach, one quickly begins to get the sense that he's not locked in there with them, but rather... well, you get the idea. Given the amount of walls Riki punches his opponents through and things (mostly bodies, admittedly) he tears apart with his bare hands, it's evident from the off that Riki could probably just punch his way out of prison were he so inclined.

Thankfully for us, the oiled muscleman seems content to wait and react, the prison giving him no shortage of things to punch off or through in defence of either himself or others. The film's reputation is true; packing an incredible level of gore and violence (think the likes of Braindead and Evil Dead 2), it's at once exhilarating and repulsive, the prison movie The Human Centipede 3 wishes it was. If Riki is an underwritten blank slate of a hero, its villains are a wonderful set of malevolent monsters, ranging from bulky henchmen to gruesome gluttons and... well, whatever the governor is! Bill Boss, eat your heart out.

There have been DVD releases before, but the film has never been as clear as in Mediumrare's Blu-ray (and standard definition DVD) restoration. The blood and gore pops from the screen just like the eyeballs and body parts. An interview, commentary and a featurette aside, it's a little paltry when it comes to special features though, making it a less comprehensive release than it could have been.

Apart from those small niggles, (and bearing in mind that this isn't everyone's cup of tea) The Story of Ricky is a fantastic re-emergence of one of cult cinema's most exciting flavours. Riki-Oh, you're so fine.

JOEL HARLEY

9

BLOODY SIN: ABOMINATIONS OF THE THIRD REICH

VOD / CERT: 18 / DIRECTOR: DOMIZIANO CHRISTOPHARO / SCREENPLAY: FILIPPO SANTANIELLO, DOMIZIANO CHRISTOPHARO / STARRING: DALLAS WALKER, NANCY DE LUCIA, ROBERTA GEMMA, LORENZO BALDUCCI / RELEASE DATE: SEPTEMBER 8TH (US)

As an homage to – or pastiche of – the Italian cinema of the 1960s and 1970s, Bloody Sin walks a very fine line between being authentically so bad it's good, and being deliberately so good at what it's doing that it's actually bad. Certainly for modern audiences not familiar with the genre and titles it is referencing, the tone and production will be as much of a shock as anything found within the film.

A crew of pornographers from New York – in reality all Italians and badly dubbed into appallingly accented English, some so poorly that subtitles will almost certainly be required – travel to an ancient Italian castle, intending to revitalise the magazine they work for with some adventurous torture photography. There they are greeted by the castle's German owner, Terence Fisher, whereupon two tales of old evil collide in bizarre and unpredictable ways.

Director Domiziano Christopharo's attention to authenticity runs to casting a porn actress as his porn star, with a performance to match, while Dallas Walker as Fisher (no relation to the Hammer film director, as pointed out onscreen) is a complete cinema novice – and manages to give one of the film's more interesting performances. Utilising split screen, stop-motion dream sequences, sepia monochrome and turning comic book pages as between-scene screen wipes, there's hardly a rabbit Christopharo won't pull out of his hat in order to emulate the feel of the films he is evidently so in thrall to.

And mostly it works, often incredibly well – but perhaps too well. With a group of characters who are all either dumb or eccentric, or both, and with performances that are universally both arch and simultaneously stilted (often leaving 'accidental' pauses between lines of dialogue), it's impossible to really care about anyone, which is hardly the point. The story itself – or rather, stories, with Bloody Sin deliberately confusing matters by telling its two horror narratives in parallel – is quite ostentatiously convoluted and chaotic, and only rewarding if you're not hoping for too much in the way of sense. The pay-off is worth the wait though, and there's never a point at which the film becomes too dull or too bewildering to follow.

Undoubtedly something of a folly, your mileage will vary considerably over whether you'll be able to enjoy Bloody Sin. If Garth Marenghi's Darkplace is your bag, undoubtedly you'll find much to like – although Bloody Sin falls far short of being as intentionally funny as the Channel 4 series. If, on the other hand, you like your horror to be scary, your plots to follow through logically, or your characters sympathetic, you'll probably end up disappointed. For what it's worth, this reviewer thought it was a blast.

JR SOUTHALL

7

INTERVIEW - DOMINIC BRUNT

BAIT is the new feature from EMMERDALE star DOMINIC BRUNT, whose extraordinary 'zombie' drama BEFORE DAWN rocked STARBURST's world back in 2012. We spoke to the soap actor-turned-director about his gritty, powerful and disturbing new movie set within the world of loan sharks...

STARBURST: As with *Before Dawn*, one of the themes of Bait is monsters and the effect they have on people – although here the monsters are ordinary human beings who do terrible things to other human beings. But *Bait* is more grounded and relatable. How would you categorise the film?
Dominic Brunt: To me, *Before Dawn* isn't really a genre piece, it's more of a domestic drama and the horror was allegorical; *Bait* is similar in that it's a thriller first and foremost, but I like to take things to the worst case scenario; taking an excessive situation and seeing how far you can possibly push it whilst staying faithful to the central idea. But as far as I'm concerned it's also an out-and-out horror film; on the surface it's a thriller but we're dealing with monsters no different from any other monster, totally without conscience, they're animals after their prey. That's how they live and behave and it's how they feed themselves. I actually describe it as a 'violent female revenge thriller' and I called it that even when it was just in script form, and it was great to see how far we could take that because you've got to try and get noticed somehow and rather than being a polite thriller with a polite ending, it's great to do what we feel we do best and push things to an absolute extreme.

The film's credits tell us that it's 'based on true events'. What did you find out about the world of debt collectors when you were putting the film together and how did that influence the story you wanted to tell?
It's actually based on three stories, especially one from the UK, which involved a really unpleasant gang of people. The more we read about these people, the more we thought we were going over the top and the more we thought 'Wow, we couldn't really go far enough'; these people are alive and if you Google 'loan shark' and any town or city there's a glut of stories out there, but we chose three specific stories that are true and just bent them to our needs. Being a horror film fan, it always seemed that no matter how bad a horror film was, real life and what human beings do to each other can more often than not be far worse, far more violent and upsetting and scary than anything that a monster or a paranormal force can do in your imagination. The more we read about loan sharks and what they did in real life, the more we thought 'Jesus, these are the real monsters.' We got a structure together and passed that to Paul Roundell and then he wrote the screenplay around that.

It's a strong screenplay; one of its greatest strengths is its naturalism, the sense that these are real people behaving the way real people do...
Paul really took his time on the characters even before he'd written it all down. Once he'd written it, he went back to the beginning and rewrote it and kept doing that until he had three distinct voices - Bex, Dawn and Jeremy, the debt guy - that were absolutely different from each other. The plan with Bex and Dawn was that they were like chalk and cheese; they kind of support each other and allow each other to be themselves.

Jeremy (Jonathan Slinger) is a fascinating bad guy. At first we like him and trust him and then it all gets turned on its head. It must have been a tough role to cast...
The more you look at sociopaths, the more you realise that they actually yearn for a normal steady life or to put that across and then manipulate people in order to get it. His wife is very much a trophy wife who he doesn't really like; he's got this facade of normality but actually it's all about getting more of what he thinks is his 'normal' and it's his rationale. He loves his work. Being a loan shark is the absolute perfect job for a sociopath. We had a psychiatrist with us on set working on the script and working with Jonathan so that he could get it just right. What we really wanted to avoid was the clichéd two-a-penny gangster, which can turn any film into absolute rubbish purely because they've cast the baddie wrong. If we'd got some very stereotypical gangster who had a constant 'front' on him and was just threatening, it would have been a disaster and to my mind the only person who could actually do that was Jonathan, because he can turn on a coin and I knew that he wouldn't play it like this archetypal gangster. Jo and Vicky both agreed that Jonathan had to get his comeuppance, so they weren't bothered about that side of things. It was more important that, as bad as Jonathan could be, we had to indulge that because he had to deserve his fate, otherwise it's a bit like 'Oh, what did they do *that* for?'

And 'that' is pretty intense when the girls turn the tables in a climax which – without giving too much away – is violence on virtually an operatic scale.
Well the bad guy has to get his comeuppance, there have to be consequences for his actions and I suppose that even earlier on, where he's attacking Bex by the river, it was really uncomfortable, but you're still thinking 'well, they have to get their own back on him but not just because they don't like him or they owe him money' – it has to be more than that.

PAUL MOUNT

BAIT screens at FILM 4 FRIGHTFEST on Saturday August 29th and will enjoy a limited UK cinema release on September 4th and will be available on DVD on September 7th. Check out our review on page 82.

THE LATEST NEWS FROM THE WORLD OF AUDIO ADVENTURES BY TONY JONES

AUDIOSTATIC

DOCTOR WHO

Big Finish are busy releasing covers and some details for the 2016 season of Tom Baker **Fourth Doctor Adventures**. These will feature Lalla Ward as Romana and will be available in eight monthly single CD releases from January 2016. We have already discovered that March and April will bring a pair of titles written by Jonathan Morris and including Tom Chadbon as Embery. Chadbon previously played a detective named Duggan alongside Baker and Ward in the wonderful 1979 adventure **City of Death**.

Big Finish has also been busy with the recording of **The Churchill Years** with Ian McNeice reprising the role of the formidable wartime Prime Minister. There has been a surprise announcement of a new returning character in these stories with Holly Earl returning as Lily Arwell from the Christmas special **The Doctor, The Widow and the Wardrobe**. This alongside the previously announced Danny Horn (Kazran Sardick in **A Christmas Carol**), Emily Atack and others.

WAR OF THE WORLDS

Everybodyelse Productions have begun a crowd-funding campaign for their new cinematic audio of HG Wells' 1898 classic **War of the Worlds**. The project uses the name of the first part of the novel – **The Coming of the Martians**. Martin Johnson previously crowd funded the excellent Osiris: Pilot and is an experienced producer, composer, sound engineer and sound editor. He has previously worked for both bafflegab and Big Finish. You can find out more by searching for the project on Kickstarter.

Radio 4 Extra

Radio 4 Extra is giving people a chance to catch up on two series: Colin Swash's **Paradise Lost in Space** and **Atomic Tales**. These started on Saturday August 8th in the evening slot, but will be available on iPlayer radio for a month afterwards.

Susan Sheridan: 1947-2015

Sadly we have to pay tribute to actress and voice artist Susan Sheridan, who passed away aged 68. Susan was probably best known to science fiction fans for playing the part of mathematician and astrophysicist Trillian (aka Trisha McMillan) in the original Radio 4 version(s) of **The Hitchhikers Guide to the Galaxy** in 1978, a role she returned to on stage in recent years. (The part was taken by Cindy Oswin on the LP version, Sandra Dickinson in the TV version, and Zooey Deschanel in the movie version.)

Susan was born in Newcastle and trained in Guildhall School of Music and Drama where she won the Malvern Prize for comedy. Not only did she voice Trillian, but also characters in a range of cartoons including **Jimbo and the Jet Set**, **Moomins**, **The Family Ness**, and **Animal Shelf**. She also created the character of Princess Eilonwy in Disney's **The Black Cauldron**. Susan also appeared in many plays including **Howl's Moving Castle** at Southwark Playhouse, and the one-woman show **Merry Wife of Wilton**, and toured in everything from Shakespeare to Aykbourn. TV appearances included **Rainbow**, **Bless Me Father** and even a nun in **Midsomer Murders**. She had been writing a book, **Shaking the Spear**, due to be published this year.

She is survived by her husband and three daughters. Our thoughts are with them.

BIG FINISH WE LOVE STORIES

Key titles to watch out for this month from Big Finish...

DOCTOR WHO: THE SIXTH DOCTOR
THE LAST ADVENTURE
Although not officially available for over a month, you can buy this new Colin Baker story right away from the Big Finish website. What are you waiting for?
AVAILABLE NOW

+++

DOCTOR WHO: THE FOURTH DOCTOR
4.8 RETURN TO TELOS
Tom Baker's much-loved incarnation of the Doctor continues his adventures with companion Leela (Louise Jameson); this time heading back to the planet Telos, where – in the past – Peter (Bernard Holley) and Jamie (Frazer Hines) are exploring the Tomb of the Cybermen...
AVAILABLE AUGUST 30th

+++

IRIS WILDTHYME RELOADED
Played by former companion Katy Manning, Iris has encountered several Doctors in audio and book form, and is back in this brand-new 8-part series!
AVAILABLE AUGUST 31st

+++

DARK SHADOWS
48 DELIVER US FROM EVIL
Forget that recent film version, and immerse yourself in the latest tale based upon the classic Gothic TV series. A self-contained atmospheric horror story, this is perfect for listening to as the nights draw in...
AVAILABLE AUGUST 31st

To order, or for more information, head over to ***bigfinish.com***

REVIEWS

THE LATEST AUDIO RELEASES REVIEWED AND RATED

WE ARE THE DALEKS

AUTHOR: JONATHAN MORRIS / PUBLISHER: BIG FINISH / STARRING: SYLVESTER MCCOY, BONNIE LANGFORD, KIRSTY BESTERMAN / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Welcome to 1987, welcome to London, welcome to the investment opportunity of a lifetime. Welcome to our new partners – the Daleks! It's the 1980s in all its glory with the champagne-guzzling super-rich in The City deciding what's best for everyone, including the striking workers of Bradford. The Seventh Doctor and Mel arrive and quickly realise all is not as it should be, thanks to the rise of the Zenos Corporation, led by Alek Zenos (Angus Wright). Welcome to We Are the Daleks, an entertaining yet thought-provoking story by Jonathan Morris.

If the title wasn't giveaway enough, the Daleks soon make their presence felt, but gone are the days of extermination and rule through fear. Why bother when you can use the power of the free market to get what you want and allow humanity to place itself in servitude without raising an eye-stalk? Mel draws on her computer programming skills to go undercover in the Zenos Corporation and we notice also that more and more people are spending their time playing the game Warfleet. Just where do the advanced consoles come from? Mel soon finds out.

Not only is this story set in the 1980s but it has the feel of a story that could have been written then. The political parodies are all too familiar and if painted with heavy strokes, this is no more than certain stories of the time are guilty of (We're looking at you, Happiness Patrol). There is a lot more to this than political point-scoring as the nature of people and the length to which people will sink are explored. In Doctor Who, the Daleks are often compared to Nazis; in this story, Jonathan Morris has us look closer to home. Underneath the action, inevitable betrayals and touches of humour, there are one or two moments when the listener might wonder how far-fetched the ideas presented actually are.

As ever, the cast are all strong (Mary Conlon's Celia Dunsthorpe is chilling in her portrayal of a woman only too happy to deal with any alien power) and the direction keeps the action flowing. The story has one or two more predictable moments, including the resonance with Orson Scott Card's Ender's Game (curiously, Card is noted for his strong political views – is there another layer at work here?), but this is by the by.

All ends well, we learn some new things about the Daleks, and a new trilogy is underway.

With the 201st release in the main range, Big Finish has provided a great point for new fans to try the main range, unburdened by years of interlinked releases. A triumph!

TONY JONES

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THE GALAXY QUEST RESTORATION PROJECT: LILLITH

AUTHOR: DAVID A. MACKENZIE, SIMON MEDDINGS / PRODUCER: TONY LUNN / STARRING: KARIM C. KRONFLI, JEN RHODES, TONY LUNN, SUSAN J. RITTA, RICK MOYER, AL KESSEL, SARAH GOLDING / PUBLISHER: FICTIONSHED / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Galaxy Quest was a 1999 sci-fi comedy movie that was heavily inspired by Star Trek and gently poked fun at that show. Its premise was quite a fun one; what if all the actors from an old cult TV series suddenly found themselves in space, battling aliens and the like. The movie has enjoyed a cult following ever since its release. The Galaxy Quest Restoration Project is one such example; it's a fan-made, not-for-profit audio drama that reimagines the fictional TV show.

In other words, The Galaxy Quest Restoration Project: Lillith is a labour of love. All the voice actors are also fans of the movie and everyone involved has given up some spare time to produce this short audio drama, which can be downloaded, free of charge, at www.galaxyquest.tv.

Lillith starts off with an interview with Gwenn Demarko, played by Sigourney Weaver in the movie and voiced by Jen Rhodes in this production. Demarko talks about her career and how she came to play the role of Lt. Tawny Madison in Galaxy Quest. It's essentially a short skit, establishing the character of Demarko as a somewhat bitter and fairly sarcastic actress who still resents her fellow co-stars. The humour is quite simple (and mostly reliant on gags), but the performances are strong and it works well.

The main story is a short but sweet Galaxy Quest adventure. Because this is audio, the clunky movements of the actors are replaced by less than smooth exposition. This adds to the overall effect and gives the production a real '70s charm. Given that the cast are trying to imitate established actors who were themselves trying to play other actors playing specific cheesy sci-fi roles, the cast do very well indeed. Trying to impersonate Alan Rickman is a tall order, but impersonating Alan Rickman who was impersonating Leonard Nimoy as a spock-like alien? It's a tall order, but it works.

The plot is okay; it's your typical 'Alien menace of the week' storyline which runs along pretty obvious lines. The plot has plenty of shout-outs to 20th century sci-fi tropes and is quite fun. The dialogue does feel a little like it's been lifted out of a game of Artemis Bridge Simulator at times, but then the technical jargon is supposed to be simplistic so this works in its favour.

Overall, The Galaxy Quest Restoration Project: Lillith is a very promising start to what could well be compulsive listening.

ED FORTUNE

7

BRAND NEW FULL-CAST AUDIO ADVENTURES
JOHN BARROWMAN IN
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OST

THE STARBURST GUIDE TO THE LATEST SOUNDTRACKS BY NICK SPACEK

Quentin Tarantino announced during last month's San Diego Comic-Con that Ennio Morricone will be scoring all of the director's **The Hateful Eight**. This isn't the first time Tarantino has used Morricone's music in his films. Most recently, **Inglourious Basterds** used music the composer had written for films such as **The Big Gundown**, **Revolver**, and **Allonsanfàn**, and **Django Unchained** used music from **Two Mules for Sister Sara**, along with the original composition, *Ancora Qui*. This does mark the first time that Tarantino will have an original score for one of his films, as all of his prior movies have featured previously-released music or pop songs recorded specifically for them, such as Urge Overkill's cover of Neil Diamond's *Girl, You'll Be a Woman Soon* in **Pulp Fiction**.

The Philip Glass and Marco Beltrami score for the **Fantastic Four** reboot is out, and is not as exciting as one was hoping. This is for the most part another standard superhero score, although there are aspects to it that raise it up a little more than the usual martial pomp. The strong emphasis on strings lends an aspect to certain parts of the score, such as *Ruin*, that really emphasises the sci-fi aspect of the Fantastic Four's story. The utilisation of Glass adds flourishes and small details that play up the body horror aspect of the characters, as well. The digital bonus cut from producer and rapper El-P is the best thing here, though.

La-La Land releases Joe Kraemer's score for **Mission Impossible: Rogue Nation** this month. In a delightful rarity, the score was conducted by the composer. It's a rousing, brass-heavy score, as one would expect for such a spy film. It's available as both a compact disc and via digital download, although the CD contains two tracks - *It's Impossible* and *This is the End, Mr Hunt* - not available on the digital version. Additionally, the label has put out a six-CD set of music from the original television series to coincide with the new film. In addition to a trove of previously unreleased music, the music has been restored and remastered.

In further Morricone news, there are a couple of reissues worth noting. While not a genre film specifically, the 1990's **Cinema Paradiso** is such a love letter to the joys of film that we feel AMS Records' new re-release bears mentioning. The Italian label is making Morricone's score available on vinyl for the first time in 15 years, in a gatefold sleeve with fantastic new cover artwork. It's on solid purple and clear transparent mixed vinyl, and given that this is one of the highlights of latter-era Morricone music, you'd do well to add it to your library.

At the same time, AMS has another Morricone score, this time to the 1973 spaghetti western, **My Name is Nobody**. Also in a gatefold sleeve with new artwork, this might not be as well-known as the maestro's work for **A Fistful of Dollars** or as cultishly revered as **A Fistful of Dynamite**, but is just as necessary as both.

Rusted Wave announced earlier last month that they would be adding to their line of **Wet Hot American Summer** merchandise the first official music release from the 2001 film. A 7-inch single featuring Craig Wedren and Theodore Shapiro's *Higher and Higher*, as well as Wedren's *Wet Hot American Summer*, was put out just in time for the Netflix debut of **Wet Hot American Summer: First Day of Camp**. Since there is no official soundtrack for the movie, this is a mini soundtrack of sorts. Rusted Wave worked with Wedren to remaster the tracks for the limited-edition release.

We thought we'd seen the last of the new wave of soundtrack labels, but it appears there's another one. Japanese-based label Brave Wave has created a new imprint, called Generation, 'that stands for definitive editions of legendary video game soundtracks.' Their concept is to create the ultimate versions of these

game scores, with the first release being a double vinyl LP of **Street Fighter II**'s arcade music. The Generation release will feature both the CPS-1 and CPS-2 versions of composer Yoko Shimomura's music. A release date hasn't been announced, other than 'later this year.'

Screamworks Records digitally released Wojciech Golczewski's score for Ted Geoghegan's latest film, **We Are Still Here**. Much in the way that Fabio Frizzi's music bolstered Lucio Fulci's work on the likes of **Zombie Flesh Eaters** with metronomic precision and build, so does Wojciech Golczewski's score. Tones and drones for days highlight this '80s Fulci throwback. For those who found Disasterpeace's score to **It Follows** not minimalist or creepy enough, this is the score to get, and it's available from all major digital music retailers, as well as Spotify.

Finders Keepers' founder Andy Votel teased via his Twitter account that the label would be putting out a CD and LP from Magnetic System, a mid-to-late '70s supergroup featuring Franco Bixio, Fabio Frizzi, and Vincenzo Tempera. Given the group's astonishingly varied releases, it's hard to figure out what may be on it. However, given that oeuvre includes an unreleased score for an Umberto Lenzi **Godzilla** film whose sole single shares cover art with this upcoming LP, one can hope for some seriously deep electronic funk cuts.

Giallo Disco Records' latest release is an imaginary soundtrack for a fake film. Bearing no relation to the 2014 Matthew Berkowitz thriller of the same name, **Wild in Blue** is a faux '80s teen drama described as 'controversial.' Listening to the cuts by the likes of Umberto, Antoni Maiovvi, and more, I like to think that the film might have been the sort of thing that took the blunt honesty of **The Breakfast Club** and combined it with the cocaine-fuelled antics of **Less Than Zero**. The electronic synth-laden music is available digitally and on LP.

Brad Fiedel's score to **Terminator 2: Judgment Day** has seen two double vinyl LP re-releases announced this past month. Online retailer Zavvi had an exclusive transparent version in a limited edition of 500 that has already sold out, despite not being due out until

early September. Silva Screen's version on liquid metal silver in transparent 180-gram vinyl should fare slightly better, with a doubly-large pressing, limited to 1000. Either way, try to get your hands on this. It's one of the finer '90s scores out there, and having it in some way, shape, or form is a necessity for any genre fan.

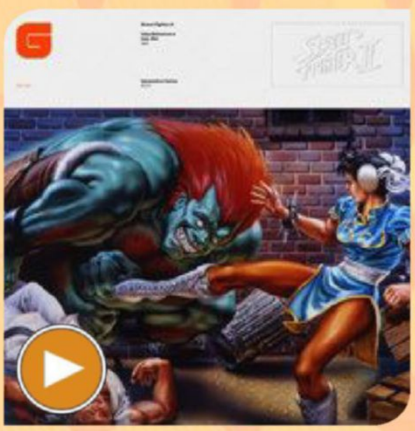
Speaking of James Cameron film scores re-released as double vinyl LPs, Mondo put out James Horner's **Aliens** score at Comic-Con on limited-edition vinyl. It obviously sold out rather quickly, but one of the hallmarks of recent Mondo releases is that while there are limited variants only available at certain times or places, they're making a concerted effort to release these as readily-available retail versions, too. Keep an eye out for this at your local shop or online soon.

Mondo also did a wide release of Gustavo Santaolalla's score to the 2013 post-apocalyptic survival game, **The Last of Us**. It's a massive four-LP set featuring all of the music from the game, as well as music from the *Left Behind* expansion pack.

In further Comic-Con release news, Rare Studios put out the music to the 1991 Nintendo game, **Battletoads**, by David Wise, in conjunction with iam8bit. It was a limited-edition of 300 copies on a slime-coloured vinyl LP, but we keep hearing rumours of a wider release, although nothing definite. In terms of fun releases, this might rank right up there with that Enjoy the Ride Records **Best of Nicktoons** double LP – which just sold out of its second pressing.

If you enjoyed Dustbug Records' last release – the Christopher Lee-narrated story-on-record version of the Hammer **Dracula** film – you'll absolutely flip for their edition of **The Legend of the 7 Golden Vampires**, which is narrated by Peter Cushing. The 1974 Kung Fu vampire film was billed as 'black belt vs. black magic,' and features a James Bernard score. The record has been restored from the original tapes and pressed on blood red and black belt marbled 180-gram vinyl, limited to 500 copies.

Finally – because they're not due out until October 16th – Relapse Records announced both a new LP from Zombi, entitled **Shape Shift**, as well as a solo release from the duo's Steve Moore. That solo release is the score to the 2014 Belgian horror film, **Cub**. It's a double-dose of electronic music, and the tracks that have thus far premiered seem to indicate positive things.



THE ΩMEGA FACTOR

STARBURST checks out one of the latest audio adaptations of a classic TV property; what is THE OMEGA FACTOR?

At first glance, a ten-episode TV series from 1979 that was killed off by Mary Whitehouse may not seem the most obvious choice for a new set of audio dramas. Fortunately for fans, Big Finish is more than up to the challenge of *The Omega Factor*.

The original show was created by Jack Gerson (*Z-Cars*, numerous thrillers and *High Living*, Scotland's first ever soap). Its hero was Tom Crane (James Hazeldine), whose emerging psychic powers brought him to the attention of the mysterious Edinburgh-based Department 7 and scientist Dr Anne Reynolds (Louise Jameson). The programme explored a lot of difficult (at the time) territories, and the episode *Powers of Darkness* earned a letter from Mary Whitehouse describing its scenes of the supernatural and a man burning to death as *thoroughly evil*. The final ingredient was the so-called Omega conspiracy, a group set on domination through mind control.

Roll forward to 2015 and enter Big Finish in the form of Line Producer David Richardson, script editor Matt Fitton and director Ken Bentley. Buoyed by the success of their relaunch of the BBC series *Survivors* on audio, the time was right for another, darker series. *The Omega Factor* fitted the bill perfectly as it was a British production, sat firmly in the realm of the supernatural and wasn't afraid to tell dark stories. It helped that Louise Jameson was already a stalwart of many dozen Big Finish products already (including *Survivors*, as well as reprising her role of Leela in multiple *Doctor Who* titles). Once Jack Gerson's daughter Natasha (who also appeared in the TV series as Morag) had given permission, the task of creating a new set of stories began.

There were two important things to decide early on: when to set the series and how to replace Tom Crane, as James Hazeldine passed away in 2002. The solution was the same for both these problems – make the new series contemporary and introduce a new character, Adam Dean. Adam (played by Big Finish regular John Dorney) is the son of Tom Crane and, like his father, has problems dealing with emerging psychic powers. Keeping the series in Edinburgh was a much easier decision and adds to the distinct feel of the stories, while also echoing the TV series. A more interesting decision was to take the Omega conspiracy off the table (at least for now) and allow the new series time to develop the central characters.

For new fans approaching the series for the first time, it is easy to think of it as being a British version of *The X-Files*. David Richardson rejects that simple labelling for a number of reasons including the different medium and the fact *The Omega Factor* came first by many years (fourteen to be precise). The original show was very much about the department and focused entirely on the supernatural, and it is true the new audios do centre very much on a male and female lead, but the similarities to *The X-Files* end there. A major plus point of the decision to set the new series in the present is the fact it gives a lead role to an older character, something still fairly uncommon. Both David and Louise are proud that the character of Dr Anne Reynolds is still working and still gathering evidence of the more unusual aspects of the human mind.

The first story, *From Beyond*, is by Matt Fitton and introduces the main characters while telling a spooky story in its own right. This Fitton does with his usual skill. He was only dimly aware of the TV series (being too young), but when watching the DVD in preparation for the writing did have a sense of familiarity with certain moments including the climax of the aforementioned *Powers of Darkness* – something a nine-year-old should probably not have been watching! Matt also prepared himself by reading the Jack Gerson novel to get more insight into how Jack himself saw the story of *The Omega Factor*. Big Finish has released an audiobook of this, read by Louise.

The second story, *The Old Gods*, takes us into the depth of the Scottish countryside for a tale of a remote community eschewing the twenty-first century and the trappings of technology. It is written by Phil Mulryne, and is very much a modern take on the story of meddling in things best left undisturbed. Adam is working alongside Anne on Department 7 matters while he tries to understand what is happening to him. Terry Molloy and Camilla Power round out the story perfectly as a cult druid and a scientist respectively, and the various interactions between them and the Department 7 heroes allow for a lot of character exploration.

Cavan Scott's third story, *Legion*, explores the shady underside of exorcism, still alive if not well in Scotland, or so it seems. It is hard to do justice to this story without spoilers, but it's fair to say it adds to the overall arc in a legitimate and pleasing way that raises questions fans will want answering.

Director Ken Bentley penned the final story, *The Hollow Earth*, and this is a real-time tale of a church succumbing to supernatural forces, with hell itself making an appearance. This is an intense listen, and demands quality headphones/hi-fi to get the full effect.

As an audio, *The Omega Factor* has production challenges: the character of Morag (yes, Natasha Gerson makes a return) was a mute; psychic events were all shown using lots of white light. As ever, special attention had to be given to the soundscape (Martin Montague) and the music (Executive Producer Nick Briggs). Nick upset many a fellow train passenger as he listened to edits of the series on the way to work.

This then is *The Omega Factor*. Available now, it marks the first of what we can only hope will be many forays into the dark world of the supernatural.

TONY JONES

You can find out more and purchase THE OMEGA FACTOR on CD or Digital Download at ***bigfinish.com***

ED FORTUNE BRINGS YOU THE LATEST NEWS FROM THE WORLD OF GENRE LITERATURE

BRAVE NEW WORDS

British Fantasy Award Nominees Announced

The British Fantasy Society has released the list of nominees for its coveted BFA. This year's selection showcases the exciting and diverse range of voices that make up the UK's genre industry, and there are some excellent works on the list. The Robert Holdstock Award for Best Fantasy novel has a very exciting range of works which includes KT Davie's **Breed**, Frances Hardinge's **The Cuckoo's Song** and Edward Cox's **The Relic Guild**. The other categories are similarly exciting. Small press publishers such as NewCon Press, Fox Spirit Books, and The Alchemy Press are also well represented in various categories. Familiar faces such as Sarah Lotz as well as steampunk writers Lavie Tidhar and Jonathan Green could also win awards.

YALC is a Hit

2015's Young Adult Literature Convention proved to be a smash hit. The London-based event was part of the London Film and Comic Con this year and added a much needed word nerd element to the whole affair. In addition to hordes of literary inspired cosplayers, the event featured the likes of Ben Aaronovitch, Carrie Hope Fletcher, Cassandra Clare, Charlie Higson, Dawn Kurtagich, Den Patrick, Francesca Haig, Holly Bourne, Lou Morgan, Lucy Saxon, Malorie Blackman, Sarah Pinborough, and Will Hill.

Get THE PENITENT DAMNED for Free

Django Wexler's popular **Shadow Campaigns** series is set to lure new readers in thanks to a recent addition, **The Penitent Damned**. It's a punchy little story about a remarkable assassin who takes on a demonically powered thief, and it's being given away free via Goodreads and Amazon. Wexler has also created a novella , **The Shadow of Elysium**, which introduces a new character, as well as filling you in on what happens next. We're rather fond of the flintlock fantasy series and can't wait to see where it goes.

100 REASONS TO HAVE SEX WITH AN ALIEN Wins Rhysling

Congratulations to F.J. Bergmann for winning the Science Fiction Poetry Association's Best Long Poem Rhysling Award for the wonderfully titled **100 Reasons to Have Sex with an Alien**. The top prize for Best Short Poem went to **Shutdown** by Marge Simon.

Scissor Sister to Write Book

Cassell Illustrated has commissioned Scissor Sisters' female lead singer Ana Lynch to write a book on robots. Lynch, better known to her fans by her stage name of Ana Matronic, is a lifelong fan of all things robotic, and has a 'cyborg tattoo'. The book, called **Robot Takeover: 100 Iconic Robots of Myth, Popular Culture & Real Life**, promises to be comprehensive.

Dodo Ink Launches

Black Out author Sam Mills has teamed up with essayist Thom Cuell and marketing specialist Alex Spears to launch Dodo Ink, a publishing house that specialises in 'difficult and challenging fiction'. They intend to publish three novels per year, beginning with Seraphina Madsen's psychedelic road trip novel **Dodge and Burn**, and **The Eleventh Letter**, a Lynchian ghost story.

Fran Wilde and Adrian Tchaikovsky Join Tor

Shadows of the Apt author Adrian Tchaikovsky has signed up with Pan Macmillian genre label Tor to produce novel-length sword and sorcery tale **Spiderlight**. It follows a team of typical adventurers who team up with a giant spider, and frankly we can't wait to read a story told from the spider's perspective. (We're sure Frodo was fibbing about Shelob, after all.)

Tor have also signed up prolific fantasy short story creator Fran Wilde. Her debut novel is to be called **Updraft** and is about a 'city of living bone [which] rises high above the clouds, its past lost to legend.'

Man Booker Prize Snubs Kazuo Ishiguro

Kazuo Ishiguro's **The Buried Giant**, a tale that uses a backdrop of swords and sorcery to discuss moral conflict, has failed to make the longlist for the Man Booker Prize. Ishiguro's work had been hotly-tipped for the award due to the author's own literary weight and the extremely positive critical reception. Sadly, the Man Booker has yet again proven that it is not relevant to writers, publishers or readers by producing a longlist of mostly impenetrable works. Many of these are destined to be bought and then left abandoned, half-read, on the shelf, further discouraging the general public from reading. We wish Ishiguro the best of luck with winning an award that actually matters instead.

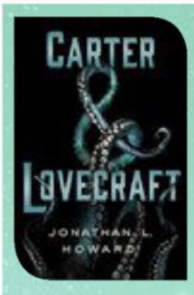
Gemmel Awards Announced

The winners of the Gemmell Awards were announced at the cutting edge Nineworlds Geekfest Heathrow, London. The Ravenheart Award for best cover art went to Sam Green for **Words of Radiance** by Brandon Sanderson. Not to be outdone, Sanderson himself won the Legend Award for the same book, and the the Morningstar Award for best debut went to **The Emperor's Blades** by Brian Stavely.) A grand total of 36,759 votes were cast online, over two rounds. We wish Sanderson the best of luck with his shiny new award, which just happens to be a very large, and very real, fantasy-style axe, produced by Raven Armouries.

STARBURST's own book podcast, **THE BOOKWORM**, is filled with all the latest news, reviews and interviews and can be found on Twitter **@radiobookworm**

COMING SOON

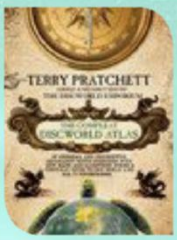
ED FORTUNE HIGHLIGHTS NOTEWORTHY NEW TITLES



CARTER & LOVECRAFT

AUTHOR: JONATHAN L. HOWARD
PUBLISHER: THOMAS DUNNE BOOKS
RELEASE DATE: OCTOBER 20TH

Possibly one of the best ideas we've heard for a buddy cop story for a while. **Carter & Lovecraft** tells the tale of Carter, a cop-turned-private detective who inherits a bookstore in Rhode Island. He soon discovers that H. P. Lovecraft wasn't writing fiction when he created his Cthulhu mythos stories. He also teams up with Lovecraft's granddaughter along the way. If this sounds like it could be another **True Detective**, you may be pleased to learn that the TV rights have already been sold to Warner Brothers.



THE DISCWORLD ATLAS

AUTHOR: TERRY PRATCHETT & THE DISCWORLD EMPORIUM
PUBLISHER: DOUBLEDAY
RELEASE DATE: OCTOBER 22TH

For a series of books that made many jokes about how maps aren't needed, the **Discworld** sure has an awful lot of maps. **The Discworld Atlas** could well be the definitive guide for anyone who wants to explore the **Discworld** with a compass. Presented by those terribly reliable chaps at the Unseen University, It will take you to the Condiment Isles, trace the course of the River Kneck and explain the deserts of Klatch and Howondaland with lavish full-colour illustrations and a detailed world map.

GAME OF SCONES: ALL MEN MUST DINE

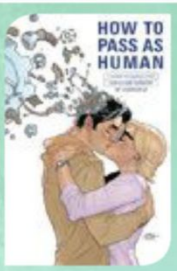
AUTHOR: JAMMY LANNISTER
PUBLISHER: ORION
RELEASE DATE: NOVEMBER 5TH

This pun-powered recipe book inspired by **Game of Thrones** is sure to make an appropriate gift for anyone who read the books and wanted to be the character Hot Pie. It's filled with lots of photos that will inspire you to decorate your food in an appropriately Westeros-style, as well as recipe and ingredient lists. Filled with jokey names such as The Red (Wedding) Velvet Cake, Joffrey's Jaffas, and Jaime & Cersei's Family Mess. One is advised not to sit on the Iron Scone, as it will ruin your trousers.

DEAD FUNNY: ENCORE

EDITORS: ROBIN INCE, JOHNNY MAINS
PUBLISHER: SALT PUBLISHING
RELEASE DATE: OCTOBER 1ST

Science funny man Robin Ince and modern master of the horror anthology Johnny Mains have come together yet again to present another collection of mirthful macabre mayhem. Like the previous book, the stories within have been produced by some of the most promising talent from the UK comedy scene. Last year's collection was a triumph of spooky and silly, so we have high hopes that this editorial team will be able to do it again with this new set of stories.



HOW TO PASS AS HUMAN

AUTHOR: NIC KELMAN
PUBLISHER: DARK HORSE
RELEASE DATE: OCTOBER 22ND

Alas, this is not the guide that you have been waiting for. **How to Pass as Human** is a sci-fi love story about Android Zero (aka Zach) who is trying to solve the mystery of his own creation with the assistance of Andrea, a human woman who seems very, very friendly. Written in the form of a Field Guide, Zach will discover much more than what his serial number is. Part comedy, part romance and 100% science fiction, this one is for those who need a guidebook when it comes to love.

WELCOME TO NIGHT VALE

AUTHOR: JOSEPH FINK AND JEFFREY CRANOR
PUBLISHER: HARPER PERENNIAL
RELEASE DATE: OCTOBER 20TH

The popular creepy podcast drama about a small desert town in which every conspiracy theory is true has finally arrived in print format. The story follows Night Vale pawn shop owner Jackie Fierro, who has become cursed by a piece of paper that she cannot put down. She is assisted by Diane Crayton, a woman with the weirdest sorts of family problems and whose life seems inextricably tied to Jackie Fierro. Expect hilarious strangeness and an engaging story that will stay with you for some time.

THING EXPLAINER: COMPLICATED STUFF IN SIMPLE WORDS

AUTHOR: RANDALL MUNROE
PUBLISHER: JOHN MURRAY
RELEASE DATE: NOVEMBER 24TH

Randall Munroe is best known for his popular webcomic, XKCD, in which he pokes fun at complicated concepts using humour and stick figures. With **Thing Explainer: Complicated Stuff in Simple Words**, Munroe attempts to explain things using only drawings and a vocabulary of just 1,000 words. This means that microwaves become food-heating radio boxes and bridges get described as very tall roads. Expect Munroe's dry humour and warm wit throughout.

THE WALKING DEAD: INVASION

AUTHOR: JAY BONANSINGA
PUBLISHER: THOMAS DUNNE BOOKS
RELEASE DATE: OCTOBER 6TH

Heroine Lilly Caul is in danger once more in this latest expansion into Robert Kirkman's **Walking Dead** world. This time Lily has to deal with a new band of survivors who are slavishly devoted to a fanatical preacher. Worse still, this cult seemingly has a devastating secret weapon that may very well destroy everything that Lily and her friends have worked for so far. Expect the usual levels of drama and gore that we've come to expect from all things **Walking Dead**.

THE LATEST RELEASES REVIEWED AND RATED

REVIEWS

ADVENTURE TIME: THE ORIGINAL CARTOON TITLE CARDS SEASONS 3 & 4

AUTHOR: PENDLETON WARD / PUBLISHER: TITAN BOOKS / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

The fact that the makers of Adventure Time saw the potential of releasing a book simply made up of the title cards from the first two seasons of the show is an incredible thing. The fact that it was popular enough to see a second book released is just fantastic!

It's no secret that we are big fans of the first book, regularly pulling it back down off of the shelf to have another look (usually after having just seen one of the title cards appear on TV). As such, we were excited to get our hands on the second volume and can safely say that we're big fans of this book too.

The book sticks to the same format as the first, giving the final title card a full page and then having some early stages of the image, some brief text about the creation of the image and a quote from the episode on the page next to it. It's a formula that served so well the first time around so you can see why they have repeated it here.

It's a layout and style that makes the book accessible to fans of all ages, walking the fine line between appealing to children without short-changing adults. The text is fun and breezy to read, neither short-changing older fans out for information nor going into so much depth that younger fans will lose interest in what they are reading.

The finished title cards draw their inspiration from the style of old pulp novel covers and straddle many genres, including sci-fi, fantasy, romance, crime noir and horror (the title card for The Lich is a wonderfully gruesome image for what is essentially a kids cartoon).

The images are stunning (some more so than others) and the detail is tremendous. The fact that these images appear on screen for a matter of seconds at most makes the attention to detail even more impressive. In fact, if the book has a flaw, it's that it doesn't come with a selection of prints of the title cards that you could frame and put on the wall. But then we suppose the problem would be which ones you would choose.

Roll on, Volume 3!

STUART MULRAIN

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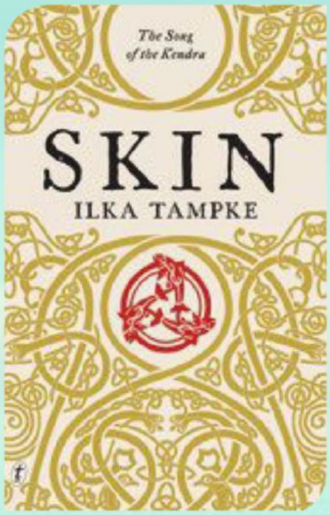

SKIN

AUTHOR: ILKA TAMPKE / PUBLISHER: HODDER & STOUGHTON / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Set in 1st century AD Britain, Skin takes a little while to get into while you familiarise yourself with the tribal way of life and their archaic speech patterns, but the book slowly sucks you in and before you know it you've been completely hooked.

It follows the life of Ailia, a teenage kitchen girl left abandoned as a baby and raised by the tribe's cook, and how her life is affected by the belief of Skin. A spiritual birthing that ties the tribespeople to the land, Skin is passed on by a child's mother in song and is a significant part of being perceived as a true person. Since Ailia is a foundling, she has no Skin and as such is unable to hold any position of authority or be taught the skills required for her to advance to a more important role within the tribe. However, it's precisely this status of social pariah that allows her to perceive the faults in the druidic philosophies and forge her own path without any weight of expectation or obligation upon her.

The female perspective from which the story is told allows the more spiritual aspects of Brythonic life to come to the fore, and in doing so thankfully avoids much of the tribal warriors' macho dick measuring that permeates many historical fantasies. Instead, the focus is on the mystery of Ailia's life and what the answers to questions both tacit and spoken mean for everyone involved, all while the looming shadow of Rome and the expansionistic campaigns of Emperor Claudius threaten the tribe's freedom and lives.

Some characters and events come straight out of history texts, but it's not necessary to, say, recognise Taliesin as the name of a quasi-mythical Welsh bard to appreciate him as Ailia's first love, or know that Cunobelinus was a real-life Celtic king whose death led to the period of instability that allowed for the Roman invasion. The seamless weaving of the historical with the fictional and the fantastical is what gives the story its magic, and the equal importance placed in all aspects of it mean that it feels just as natural for Ailia to giggle about boys with her friends as it does for her to hold the attention of earth goddesses.

The book itself feels like a written historical account of the physical and spiritual experiences that ultimately shape Ailia from girl to young woman as she fully realises the destiny that awaits her, implying a story that will be retold over generations and centuries, growing ever more fanciful with each iteration until she transcends into a figure of legend like Cadwaladr or King Arthur. At its core, Skin is a young girl's coming of age story, but its resonant prose, distinct characters, thematic depth and emotional sensitivity all combine to form a tale as evocative as it is compelling.

ANDREW MARSHALL

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THREE MOMENTS OF AN EXPLOSION: STORIES

AUTHOR: CHINA MIÉVILLE
PUBLISHER: MACMILLAN
RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Three Moments of an Explosion: Stories by Hugo Award winner and critically acclaimed author China Miéville is a collection of twenty-eight short stories. And what an eclectic mix they are. There's horror, science fiction, scripts for film trailers and other assorted weirdness from the self-confessed purveyor of "weird fiction."

There's no doubt that there's a talented cleverness at work within this collection. The Condition of the New Death is a playful tale in which, when people die, they die in the manner of computer game characters. The Dowager of Bees reads like an urban myth that only those in the world of professional gambling will have heard... or witnessed. And then there's the aforementioned trailer scripts, the best being The Crawl. What a zombie apocalypse movie that would make!

However, for all Miéville's inventiveness and literary dexterity, his stories feel coldly clinical. Worse yet, they just stop! It doesn't matter if they are three pages long or twenty, they just suddenly come to a grinding halt. This makes the shorter pieces feel like they are notes for ideas that have yet to be fully formed. The longer works aren't truly explored and so aren't given the room to breathe. This is particularly true of Polynia, in which icebergs suddenly appear over London. Teams are sent to investigate this bizarre phenomena, they disappear and that's about it. What did they find? Where did they disappear to? What happened to them? Unfortunately, this is par-for-the-course with the majority of the stories in this volume. Ambiguous and unexpected endings are a staple of the short story form and they work best when the reader has at least acquired some information with which to form a conclusion, be it correct or not. The result is that, although there is much to admire from a practical angle, there is nothing to grasp emotionally, leaving an unsatisfying emptiness.

Fans of Miéville will no doubt revel in this collection of interestingly strange ideas wrapped in exquisite prose. New and casual acquaintances, however, will likely become frustrated by the impenetrable levels of ambiguity and the continual abrupt halt in narrative, leaving them to ponder "so was that about shipwrecks, or was it an analogy of the writing process, or did I just eat too much cheese before going to bed?"

CHRISTIAN JONES

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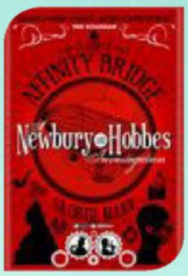

THE AFFINITY BRIDGE

AUTHOR: GEORGE MANN
PUBLISHER: TITAN BOOKS
RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Victorian London. A thoroughly modern city filled with thoroughly modern technological advancements like electrical thingamajigs, steam-powered doohickies and clockwork oojamaflips. Yes, we are in the world of steampunk... Comparable to Abaddon's Pax Britannia setting, The Affinity Bridge sees Crown agent Sir Maurice Newbury and his new assistant Miss Veronica Hobbes investigate hauntings, undead risings, a mysterious airship crash and a series of murders.

The book soars along at a swift and near relentless pace, incorporating zombies, ghosts, action, mystery and implied glimmers of artificial intelligence, but for all its genre trappings, it fails to properly establish its own identity. A few neat ideas stand out, such as a cane transforming into an electricity-shooting rifle and the ultimate revelation behind malfunctioning clockwork automata, but there is little truly distinctive enough to make the story stand out.

To its credit, the book acknowledges the poverty, disease, violence and crime rampant in Victorian times that steampunk's rose-tinted vision of the past often glosses over in favour of a romanticised view of the world being nothing but potential, and the story's forays into the less salubrious areas of the city give a necessary counterpoint to the quiet and peaceful world inhabited by the upper classes.

An unfortunate glaring oversight is the lack of development of the story's central duo. Hobbes' institutionalised sister grants her an emotional side beyond her stoic determination, but being concerned about appearing unladylike while kicking a door open is as close to characterisation as she otherwise gets. Newbury is frustratingly even less developed. While he is undoubtedly a talented and loyal servant to Her Majesty, we got no indication of how he first embarked upon his calling, or indeed what it is that drives him to regularly risk his life in service to the Empire. The largest insight into his character is an addiction to laudanum, a dependency he attempts to hide from everyone, himself included. It's entirely possible we'll be see further development of his character in subsequent books, but for now he remains a blank enigma.

Aside from this, there is nothing major wrong with the book; it's certainly an enjoyable and easy read. It just feels that tighter plotting and a more streamlined vision could have created something new and compelling, rather than familiar and distinctly average.

ANDREW MARSHALL

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THE BABA YAGA

AUTHOR: ERIC BROWN, UNA MCCORMACK
PUBLISHER: ABADDON BOOKS
RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Abaddon's Weird Space series started out well with the Devil's Nebula before faltering slightly with the bland follow-up, Satan's Reach, so the third book, The Baba Yaga, has a lot to prove.

Luckily, it's a return to form. The Baba Yaga establishes itself very quickly; the human-only civilisation known as The Expansion is terribly concerned about the alien threat known as The Weird, so much so that it's settled its differences with the alien Vetch, a competing species who have their own empire. The story focuses on Delia Walker, a senior officer in The Expansion's intelligence agency, who is advocating a more measured and tactical approach to deal with the threat of The Weird. The attack on a world very close to The Expansion's capital throws caution out of the window, and humanity sets a course for its own destruction by going into a full-on war setting. Walker, who has her own motivations for keeping the government from becoming too extreme, goes rogue in order to gather more information on the enemy, information that could well change the nature of the war.

McCormack and Brown keep a steady pace throughout this book, adding more to the Weird Space world as we go. The publisher, Abaddon Books, tends to create worlds for multiple authors to contribute to, yet up until now we've only seen books from Eric Brown. McCormack's voice is refreshing and welcome. This book has more humanity and characterisation than previous entries in the series, and the result is a much more engaging work in which we actually like the cast of characters, despite their best efforts to be unpleasant.

This is a classic sci-fi romp, filled with old school action and clever commentary on our own world. It also works entirely well as a standalone novel, meaning knowing the events of the previous Weird Space books is nice but not required. This is a lot of fun and well worth a look.

ED FORTUNE

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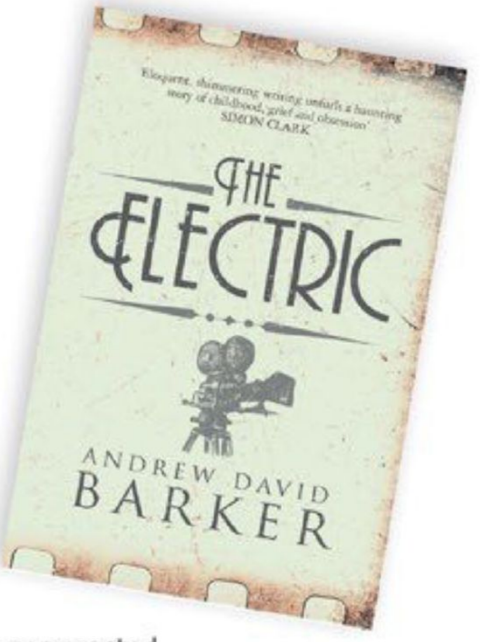
New titles available from Boo Books

THE ELECTRIC



By Andrew David Barker

The Electric. A crumbling shrine to the art of film, the abandoned cinema lies empty in the outskirts of town.

Abandoned, but not deserted...

For **The Electric** is a cinema like no other. The spirits of Hollywood's greatest stars enjoy their final turn on celluloid, watched eagerly by an audience of ghosts. When Sam Crowhurst stumbles across this terrible and beautiful secret, his life will be irrevocably changed. As the friendly and the dangerous among the dead gather around him, the last days of summer will see him discovering more about life – and the afterlife – than he ever expected.

The Electric is a stunning coming-of-age tale and a haunting love song to the power of cinema.

***Eloquent, shimmering writing unfurls a haunting story of childhood, grief and obsession* - Simon Clark**

WE CAN IMPROVE YOU

We Can Improve You explores the theme of augmentation, and what happens when science and technology combine with flesh and blood. Often surprising, sometimes startling, occasionally funny but always thought-provoking, We Can Improve You brings together a range of stories that might just become real some day…

"Enough pop, sizzle and bang to melt the circuits of the future; this collection of stories gives a whole new meaning to notions of self-improvement. Augment yourself, if you dare." JUSTINA ROBSON

"A singularly amplified collection, ranging from fantastically adaptive to the horrifically invasive. These tales of augmentation are dangerous; peel back the synthetic skin and you'll find the wires of humanity worming beneath." KIM LAKIN-SMITH

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INTERVIEW - BRIAN ALDISS

The legendary writer BRIAN ALDISS, OBE has just celebrated his 90th birthday. We met up with the multi-award winner and he opened up about his life and his work...

STARBURST: When did you first start telling stories?
Brian Aldiss: When I was three. My mother liked them, bound them up with some unused wallpaper and put them on the nursery shelf; thank god they've disappeared! It kept the other boys quiet, later when I went to public school. I hand wrote my stories, bound them in paper and charged the other boys a penny a read. The boys were very keen to read them, but equally I was very keen that they should read them so I didn't make many pennies. I always left them waiting for the next bit.

Has the market for science fiction changed?
Back in the forties, if there was a science fiction magazine it would be run by one guy, who had a little money. They would feel compelled to produce them. There was a chap in London who edited Authentic. The magazine was rather short lived, but I wrote a story for them called Pogsmith and I met up with him. We took a stroll through the streets of London, in those days it was considerably less crowded than now. I thought he was marvellous, but he hadn't got the money to keep a magazine running. A one-man band is very hard work, you know. Harder work to edit and to write the stories.

Then there was Ted Carnell. He worked for some printers just looking down on the Thames. He ran New Worlds and Science Fantasy. He kept publishing that magazine year after year, month after month. The magazine came out regularly and paid regularly. But then came a time when even Ted Carnell wearied and handed it over to Michael Moorcock, then a well-known eccentric. England must have been improving a slight bit then, because they had a man, Lord Goodman, and he could fund cultural events and magazines. Mike Moorcock and I got together and rehearsed what we could say to appeal to Lord Goodman. We thought it was very unlikely that we'd get the funding for a mere science fiction magazine. Eventually, we were shown into his presence. And he said "I understand you want your magazine subsidised. Well I'm the man to do it". Low and behold, they did subsidise New Worlds! Mike caught fire, and so vastly improved New Worlds that the incentive we had didn't cover all of the expenses. Again, there was a magazine going broke.

Dear old Mike. He had a very patient wife. To keep the fans away, he had a big notice on the door that said in very plain English "Fuck Off". On the weekend, he would lock himself in his bedroom with his typewriter and he would write. He could knock out a whole novel over a weekend and then sell to a firm in the US called Lancet. They were renegades, even amongst publishers. They didn't live in New York, they lived in Kentucky and they would buy his work for a thousand bucks in total. For the complete thing. Mike would use that money to keep New Worlds afloat.

When did you start writing science fiction?
I'll tell you a little story. I was four and a half. I walked into our sunlit lounge and someone had left the wireless on. The announcer was saying that Clyde Tombaugh had sighted a planet that would be called Pluto. I cannot tell you how thrilled I was. It was as if he was speaking personally to me… Immediately, I thought how wonderful it would be to get to the planet Pluto. As we know, it's only this year that we have managed to get a machine to Pluto.

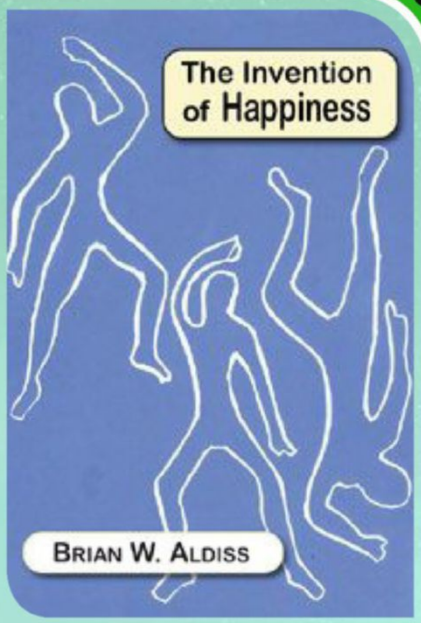
Which of your works are you most proud of?
I think very well of the *Helliconia* novels. I took two years off when I researched the whole matter. My wife wondered if I was going to write again. I was - I was working on *Helliconia*. It's an Earth-like planet and it has an Earth-like sun, but it's been captured by a giant sun on its journey through the universe. It's about the struggles and difficulties that people have living on this planet, because the seasons last for so long. The first volume takes place in spring, the second in summer and the third in the oncoming winter.

It attracted the interest of a very celebrated publisher in this country and also in the United States from a company called Atheneum. The volumes were being published at exactly the same time on both sides of the Atlantic. It did mean that a volume had to come out every 18 months. Why? Gets more punters, they said. I was unaccustomed to the speed. I would send the manuscripts to the publisher in the UK and the US. I got to know the publisher, he was a remarkable man in the way that all publishers are.

Now, the publisher over here worked without a copy editor. The USA was much more professional. I sent in the first volume and I got a 25-page letter from the copy editor who told me what I had gone adrift on. I was furious. I started to read what she said, it made very good sense. To give you an example, she'd say "*This meeting is beautifully done, but it follows another meeting. If you did those scenes the other way round, you would find that it was better*". All of this I took in. I was converted. I took in her suggestions. It was almost like a collaboration. Of course, that's what I suggested to my English publisher and meekly they followed. It was the strength of this woman and her engagement that really supplemented my rather hasty execution. I wrote a letter to this lady to thank her for collaboration, and I sent her a dozen red roses. She told me "*No one ever thanked me before.*" Just think of that; the bastards who had worked with her before had never thanked her.

That was the best thing with *Helliconia*. Except two years ago, NASA found a world with two suns. Everyone who had dismissed it for having two suns was wrong. I had done my research, I had asked astronomers. I live in Oxford, you can knock on any door and find some poor sod who longs to talk about their discipline. They didn't call it Helliconia though.

How has your writing changed?
I suppose you would hope that you would improve quite a bit. I don't know. With experience you do improve. Much of my experience came when I was younger! The fact is I also have a very good secretary. We've worked together for years and we've behaved in a very sensible way. She's very good at shorthand, so I'll stand here and we'll invent a story. We've done that with three stories, including one of the best stories I've ever wrote, *The Invention of Happiness*. It contains a reference to the Venerable Bede. He was a diviner. Imagine him sitting in a hall one dreadful winter's night and a sparrow flies through the door. Bede said "*Our life resembles the live of a sparrow; we come through one door and immediately out at another, whilst he is within, is safe from the wintry storm; but after a short space of fair weather, he immediately vanishes out of your sight, into the dark winter from which he had emerged.*" Isn't



that fantastic? Especially if Christianity has slipped off from you. I do have some regret about that. The Venerable Bede got it just right.

What would you say to the sixteen-year-old version of yourself?
Try not to age. Get laid as often as possible.

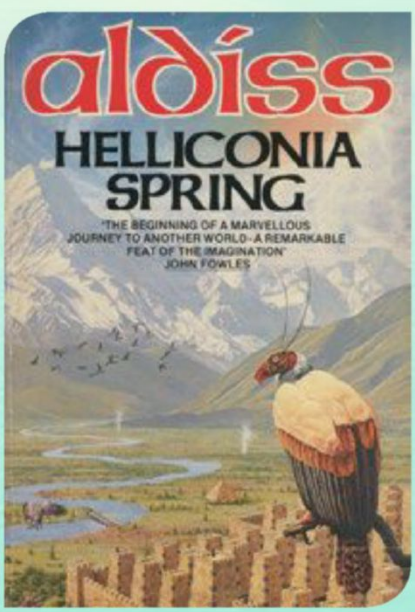
What experiences shaped your writing?
When WWII broke out I was at public school and the recruiting chap had a book with all the things you could join. You could join submarines and I wasn't dumb and I thought 'of course they want more people in submarines, they're also being sunk'. So I joined Royal Signals and I was sent out to Burma to fight the Japanese. Luckily, we won. After that, we went to India, Sumatra, Singapore and Hong Kong. When we got home we expected a reception, there was bound to be a party. There was no one. They had been ordered not to receive us with any measure of honour and I've always had that grudge. I still cannot swallow it…

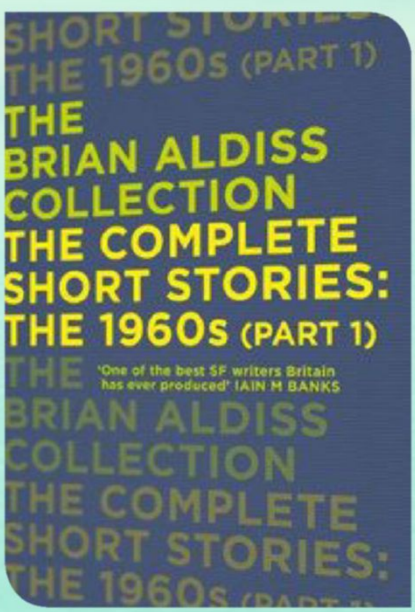
Did that drive your writing?
I don't write escapism, I want to make the bastards suffer. *Hothouse* was inspired by Sumatra, of course. When I came back to England, I felt that people enjoyed being miserable. I was wrong, I think.

Do you have any more stories to tell?
Yes I do. I dread to say this, but it's set in Russia in the 18th century when things aren't too bad. It's a big Russian novel, where the chap has to walk ten thousand miles because the motor car hasn't been invented. It will be a very happy novel.

WORDS: ED FORTUNE
PHOTO: WENDY ALDISS

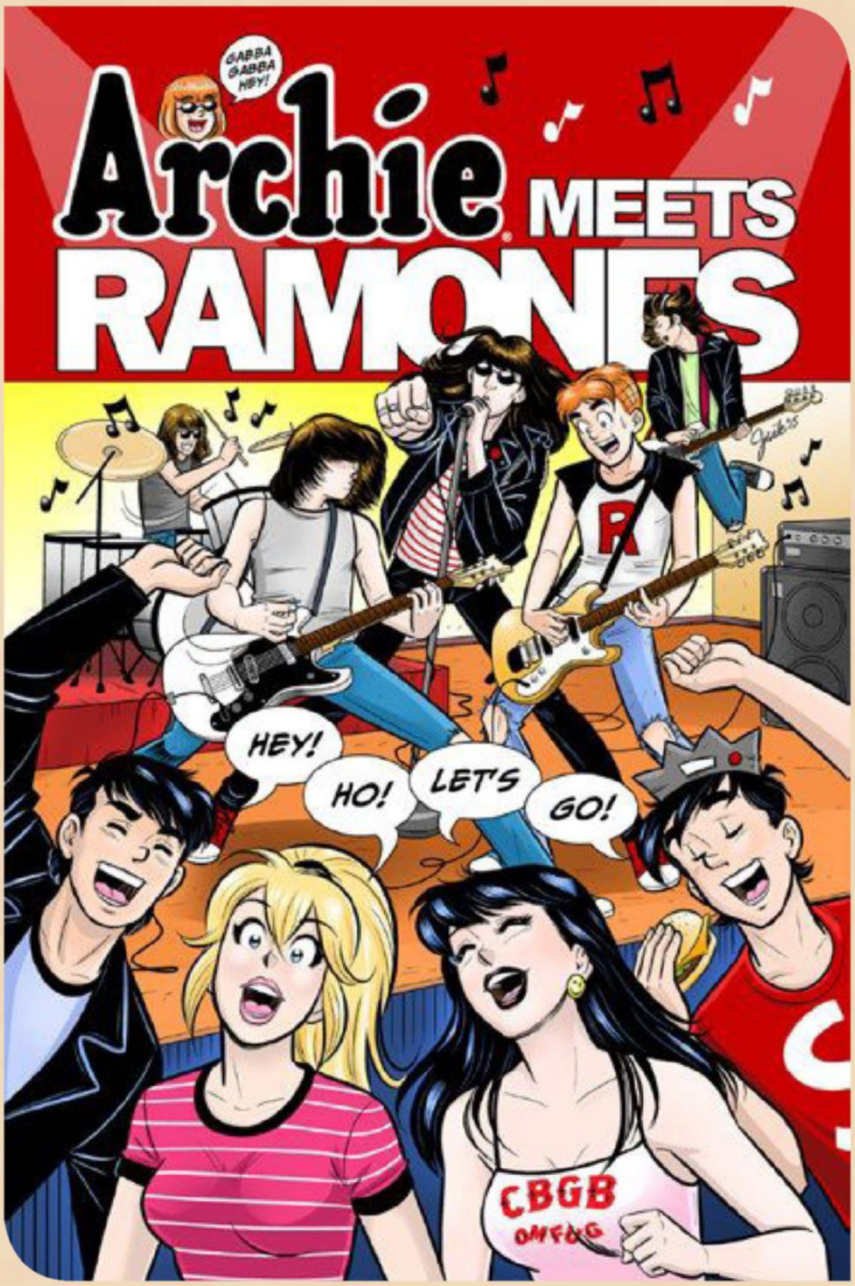
Harper Voyager release a four-volume collection of BRIAN ALDISS' short stories from the 1960s on September 24th. You can read more from our interview at **starburstmagazine.com**.





VIEW FROM THE WATCHTOWER

JOEL HARLEY PULLS MONITOR DUTY TO BRING YOU THE LATEST FROM THE WORLD OF COMIC BOOKS



If it feels like a long time since the last instalment of this humble comic book column, that's because, during the interim period, we've had Comic-Con International: San Diego. A lot has dropped in that time; we've had trailers for *Batman v Superman: Dawn of Justice** (*yes, the title's stupid but let it go already), *Suicide Squad*, and *Deadpool*. *Ant-Man* and *Fantastic Four* have been released (at very opposite ends of the quality spectrum) and I finally finished watching *Gotham* on Netflix. With so much constantly happening in the cinematic and television universes, you'd be forgiven for forgetting where it all started. Yeah, funny books!

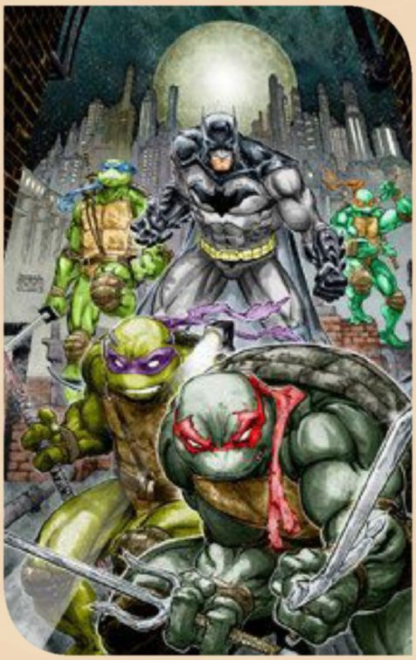
Although there's been nothing as controversial as Jesse Eisenberg likening SDCC to a 'holocaust' (no Jesse, you know what's like a holocaust? A holocaust) there's plenty going on in the worlds of speech bubbles and superheroes to give this column something to talk about for a few hundred words.

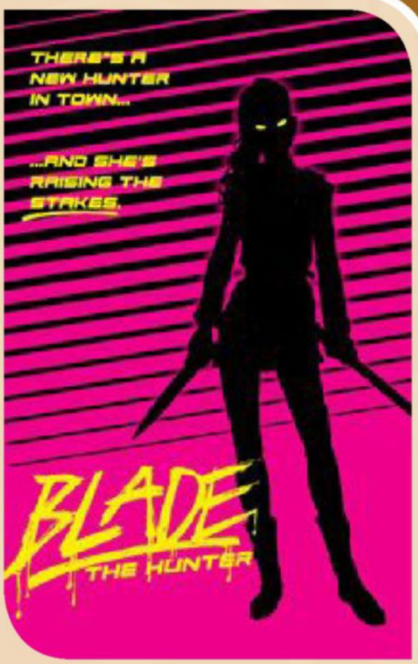
Diving in at the deep end, what would this column be without a little something from everyone's favourite all-American teenager, Archie Andrews? Well, we might as well get it out of the way. Not content with his recent match-up with the Predator and Sharknado (alas, not at the same time), Archie is set to meet American punk band The Ramones. He did meet KISS once, but after recent crossovers (plus The Punisher) this doesn't seem quite so out there. Coinciding with the 75th anniversary of *Archie Comics* and the Ramones' own 40th anniversary, *Archie Meets Ramones* is to debut in 2016.

And, for once, it'll be one of the less oddball crossovers I'll be reporting on this month. Because Batman and Robin are set to meet The Avengers! The Batman and Robin of *Batman '66,* that is. Meeting the Avengers of, well, *The Avengers*. But not those ones. That's John Steed and Emma Peel, who – according to Dan DiDio, direct from SDCC – will be meeting Batman and Robin for the first time in the pages of *Batman '66*. We're yet to hear of a release date or creative team, but it'll be one to keep an eye out for, all the same.

This one, however, is exactly what it claims to be. This November, Batman is going to meet the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles. No, really. In a partnership between DC and IDW Comics, we'll read on for six issues as The Turtles and Shredder are transported to an alternate dimension, where they land in the streets of Gotham. Expect at least one issue of misunderstanding in which Batman and the Turtles fight before realising that they have a greater enemy than themselves (just a guess: Shredder and the Joker, probably). The story will be written by James Tynion IV, with artwork by Freddie E. Williams. Turtles co-creator Kevin Eastman will provide variant covers for the series. At least this sort of explains the constant e-mails from Pizza Hut I've been getting trying to sell me *Arkham Knight*-themed Pizzas.

See, DC have been getting a lot of stick for their 'grim and gritty' output of late (and the grumpy Batman/Superman of *Dawn of Justice** *(*LET IT GO)* and whole *Suicide Squad* aesthetic aren't





helping) but it's books like *Batman '66* that prove DC hasn't completely lost its touch. And the theme continued at SDCC, with the panel New DC Universe: The Lighter Side: Are You Ready, showcasing such altogether cheerier books as *Harley Quinn, Bizarro*, and *Bat-Mite.* Not all doom and gloom then, as the creators talked audiences through upcoming adventures their comedy anti-heroes have on the boiler, including a roadtrip crossover with Harley, Poison Ivy, Catwoman, Bizarro and Jimmy Olsen. Sold, and that's even before Jimmy Palmotti starts talking about Harley's 'scatapult', which is exactly what you think it is.

No-one should know quite what to think of the news that Max Landis and Neal Adams are both set to get their own Superman limited series(es). *Chronicle* screenwriter Landis is to helm *American Alien,* worryingly described by Landis as 'the opposite of *All-Star Superman,'* and will see a younger Clark Kent get into a series of scrapes as his powers begin to manifest themselves. Meanwhile, Adams will get his hands on *Coming of the Superman,* which will see the Man of Steel face off against Darkseid and his son Kalibak, in a Kirby-inspired escapade which is also said to take in the city of Kandor and its three national heroes.

In our final bit of DC/Batman related news, there's the promising titbit that Grant Morrison is to return to two fan favourites with *Multiversity Too* and *Batman: Black and White.* Morrison's first *Multiversity* book is set to feature the Flash and is, intriguingly, described as a 'love story'. His return to *Black and White,* meanwhile, will explore different 'versions' of Batman, and will be illustrated by a series of 'alternative' artists from Los Angeles. "*Now it's open season on any weird idea,*" Morrison said, via a video with DC All Access.

Look ma, no Batman! To our chums at Marvel, then, where changes are still continuing to roll in. In news that is sure to irritate those who remain infuriated by the new *Ghostbusters* and Marvel's new iteration of Thor, fan favourite vampire killer Blade is set to look a lot less Wesley Snipes. Emerging from SDCC's 'Women at Marvel' panel, we've heard that it's bring your daughter to work day for Blade, who is set to get his own series again with offspring Fallon Grey. Alright, not quite 'female Blade' then, but it's likely she'll take the spotlight for the book, which will debut in October.

Could this spell a similar path for cinematic Blade? It's anybody's guess (although one would imagine so, given time and popularity) but the same thinking is surely behind *Spidey.* An entry level Spider-Man book aimed at the younger market, *Spidey* will be a continuity-free look at untold tales from Spider-Man's teenage years. The cinematic introduction of a younger Peter Parker can't have been far from Marvel's mind when pitching this one. No concrete details yet, but Robbie Thompson is set to take writing duties.

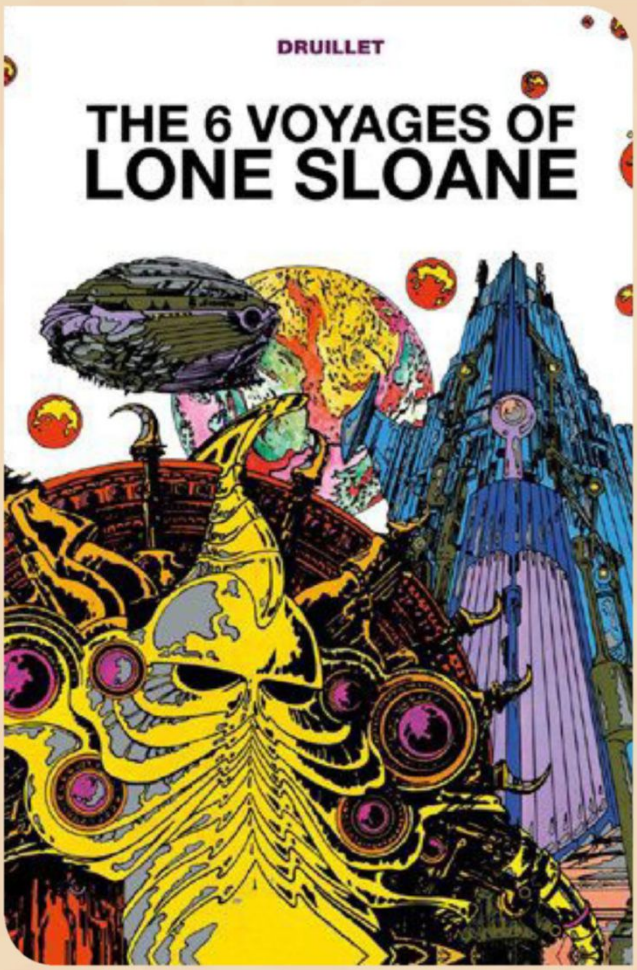
And so yet another edition of **View from the Watchtower** draws to a close**.** As ever, I can be reached through e-mail and Twitter for any comic-related gossip or chat.

And no, you didn't imagine that bit about Batman meeting the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles either. Cowabunga, dude...

Joel Harley can be contacted at:
joel.harley@starburstmagazine.com
and tweeted **@joelharley**

REVIEWS

THE LATEST COMIC BOOK RELEASES REVIEWED AND RATED



THE 6 VOYAGES OF LONE SLOANE

WRITER & ARTIST: PHILIPPE DRUILLET / PUBLISHER: TITAN COMICS / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

With almost nothing in the way of preamble, 6 Voyages begins with space traveller Sloane being chosen by a sentient throne and taken to the mad priests of a dormant deity, where an experiment-gone-wrong imbues him with phenomenal cosmic power and accompanying madness, so beginning a ceaseless journey across the universe and encounters with the bizarre entities populating it.

With Philippe Druillet being one of the founders of Métal Hurlant, it's no surprise that the book's artwork is both striking and absorbing, sucking you in with page after page featuring sorcerous contraptions of such eldritch design you can't even begin to fathom their functionality. They look as though they were conceived in a pop-art fever dream of HR Giger biomechanics and MC Escher contortions, then willed into existence by some unseen force of pure aesthetic, each image so finely detailed down to the smallest aspect, it's impossible to absorb its intricacies with a single look.

Planetside action frequently features spiked black monoliths

tearing the skies, often flanked by statues inspired by eastern mysticism bent in supplication, paeans to forgotten gods perceiving the ephemeral lives of mortals as fleeting distractions. In contrast, any events in deep space are presented superimposed in bright colour against shadowed planets and faded nebulae, an empty black void stretching out behind them in an omnidirectional chasm of barren infinity. Although the setting is sci-fi, some of the story ideas are pure fantasy, such as an island shrouded by a maze of wind or a stone bridge so gargantuan its length spans the space between galaxies, each one of Sloane's encounters only adding to the already enormous scope of the depicted cosmos.

The poetic prose narration is more than a little reminiscent of Michael Moorcock, recounting the tales as though they were mythical retellings of legendary events long since passed. Additionally, with Sloane being flung from one battle against unbalanced cosmic forces to another, it's not difficult to imagine him as an interstellar facet of the Eternal Champion. As though in response to the unspoken association, a late reference to "the universe of Elric the Necromancer" is highly doubtful to be a mere coincidence. Although each tale is short in length, none feel abridged or truncated, instead serving as brief flashes of an ongoing narrative, and one with many more adventures still to come.

ANDREW MARSHALL

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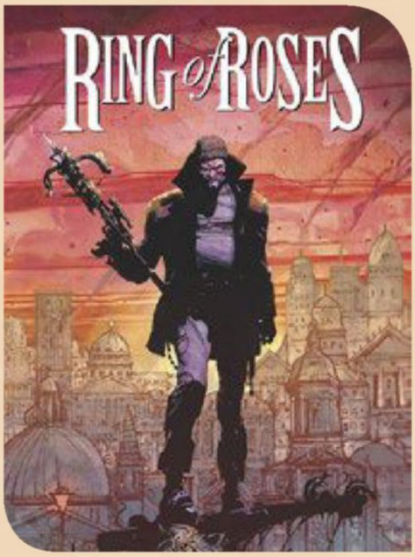

RING OF ROSES

WRITER: DAS PETROU / ARTIST: JOHN WATKISS / PUBLISHER: TITAN COMICS / RELEASE DATE: AUGUST 25TH

Ring of Roses, created by Das Petrou and Trevor Goring, was originally published in the early 1990s by Dark Horse Comics and first re-published in 2005 (at which point it contained a foreword from none other than Dave Gibbons). Roll forward to 2015 and it's once again available from Titan Comics.

Although set in London, 1991, this is not our London, but as the title might suggest a London still subject to attacks of Bubonic Plague. As Das Petrou explains in the fascinating notes at the back, history turned at the Battle of the Boyne. In Ring of Roses, the Catholics defeated William of Orange, leaving England heavily influenced by the Catholic Church.

In this version of the capital, we have a walled city and the church has substantial influence. Technology has failed to develop; we have some cars but not flight; and the threat of plague is ever present. The story starts with the murder of six priests on the Thames. A barrister, Samuel Waterhouse, investigates but has to turn to help in the form of criminal William Barnett, who ploughs his way through the city like an unstoppable force. As their investigations progress, they run the risk of alienating the powerful forces who run the city. Meanwhile, the plague continues to take its victims.

Ring of Roses works on many levels; it is a superb piece of world-crafting (do read the notes) and a solid plot with the two-pronged hero (Waterhouse and Barnett are an odd pairing, but effective) a good device for allowing us to see London from two angles. In fact, we bring a third angle as readers who recognise this London in places but at other times it is as alien a city as any from a work of fiction.

If Das Petrou needs credit, so does the art of John Watkiss. Watkiss has since worked for Disney and latterly Sony Pictures, but it is here we can enjoy on a more intimate level his first foray into graphic novels (he previously worked for agency Saatchi and Saatchi) and admire his skill.

A one-off, four-episode project from the 1990s with no follow-on, this is a work that any collector should consider owning a copy of. At just under 150 pages, it tells the story it has to tell then stops – something others might like to consider as they aim for increasingly complex and lengthy epics.

TONY JONES

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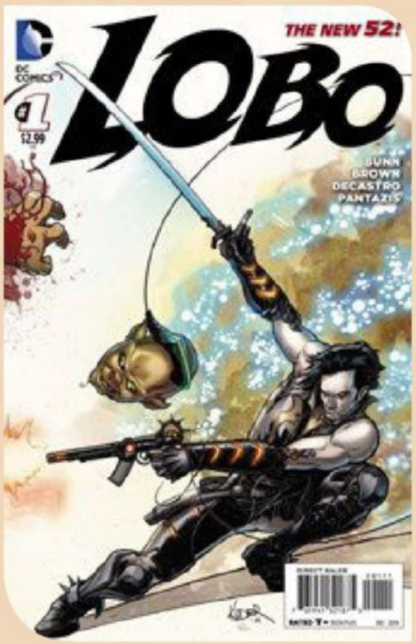

LOBO VOLUME 1: TARGETS

WRITER: CULLEN BUNN / ARTIST: VARIOUS / PUBLISHER: TITAN / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

All-new, sexy Lobo! But it's okay, because the opening pages depict The 'real' Main Man – as we know him, or knew him – in an exchange with all-new, sexy Lobo, as if to assure readers that this version doesn't negate the old one. At least, not completely.

All-new, sexy Lobo, then. Svelte and Edward Cullenised, mostly hairless and with shiny blue patches on his skin and hair. Fan of leaving his jacket open so all can behold his glistening six-pack. Swears less and has a traumatic past involving a woman he once loved. No, that doesn't sound much like Lobo to us either, but lets give it a chance. Lest we forget that 'original' Lobo's first debut saw him minus a couple of hundred pounds and wearing a bright orange jumpsuit - not always been the last bastion of biker chic himself.

Thankfully, all-new, sexy Lobo hasn't left the character's trademark violence at the door. Charged with protecting a client from six rival assassins, Lobo must not only fend off those trying to cash in on the bounty but also attempt to find out who is responsible for putting out the contract in the first place. This sends him on a bloody trail through the midst of the DC Universe, from the far reaches of outer space all the way to Earth, where a grumpy Superman is waiting – and in no mood for Lobo's nonsense.

That sounds like a fairly standard idea for a Lobo story, and Targets plays out in much the same way as one might expect, all-new, sexy Lobo or not. The main man hadn't quite been himself for years anyway (as a spoof character, like Deadpool, the bastich was at risk of becoming overexposed and a parody of himself) so this isn't quite the awful idea it could have been. The comic is still plenty violent, and nu-Lobo is a fine character to kill half an hour with. Like most of his New 52 compatriots he'll never catch on (he's a little dull), but it's nothing worth getting too outraged about. Especially when the results are as good looking as Targets, like a cross between Star Wars and Guardians of the Galaxy.

Not the main man, then – not even close – but Targets is a lot of fun. And sometimes that'll do just fine.

JOEL HARLEY

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ANIME-NATION

A MONTHLY ROUND UP FROM THE WORLD OF ANIME AND MANGA WITH DOMINIC CUTHBERT

New GUNDAM Cometh

After weeks of drumming up excitement, Sunrise has confirmed a new Gundam series, titled **Mobile Suit Gundam: Iron-Blooded Orphans**. The series is set in a new timeline, picking up 30 years after the Calamity War between Mars and Earth, boasting altogether grittier and ground-based combat, and new designs from Kenji Teraoka (**Aldnoah.Zero**). **Iron-Blooded Orphans** is set to air in Japan October 4th. No simulcast has been announced.

CAPTAIN HARLOCK Writer Dead at 55

2015 has already seen the deaths of **RWBY** creator Monty Oum and veteran voice actor Kazuya Tatekabe, and we're sad to report that **Captain Harlock** scribe Robert W. Gibson passed away in May, aged only 55. The German born author penned 17 issues of **Captain Harlock**, based on Leiji Matsumoto's manga and anime franchise, as well as **The Pirate Queen Emeraldas** and various **Robotech** titles. He was also a prominent member of the Cartoon/Fantasy Organisation San Antonio club, who were hugely influential in bringing anime and manga to an American audience in the eighties.

San Diego Comic-Con Honours YU-GI-OH! Creator

Yu-Gi-Oh! creator Kazuki Takahashi has been honoured at this year's San Diego Comic-Con with the convention's sought-after Inkpot Award. Introduced in 1974, the award acknowledges 'individuals for their contributions to the world of comics, science fiction, fantasy, film, television, animation, and fandom services'. It was presented to Takahashi for helping introduce manga to a worldwide audience. Past recipients have included Ray Bradbury, Steven Spielberg, and Stan Lee.

SOUL EATER Scribe Pens Fire Fighter Manga

Atsushi Ōkubo, creator of the brilliantly bonkers **Soul Eater**, is getting ready to launch a brand new sci-fi, firefighting themed manga series, titled **Flame-Flame Fire Fighting Regiment**. The series follows a group desperate to combat a series of mysterious human combustions, and is set to start in issue 43 of **Weekly Shonen Magazine**.

THE LEGEND OF ZELDA Manga Makes Comeback

The two manga creators who go by the name Akira Himekawa have announced plans to return to **The Legend of Zelda** manga, following a 7-year hiatus. The duo have already started work on the series, which was originally serialised in 1998. As Viz Media published 10 volumes of the **Zelda** manga in North America, expect an English translation.

VAMPIRE HUNTER D Series in the Works

Unified Pictures, a California based production studio, has revealed they'll be co-producing an adaptation of Hideyuki Kikuchi's series of novels **Vampire Hunter D**, alongside Japanese CGI animation studio Digital Frontier (**Resident Evil: Degeneration**). It's been 30 years since Toyoo Ashida first adapted the series into the seminal OVA, and 15 since Yoshiaki Kawajiri helmed a second anime foray. Both Kikuchi and Kawajiri will be involved in the production.

FRUITS BASKET Web Series Sequel Coming

Publishing company Hakusensha have unveiled **Fruits Basket another**, the sequel to Natsuki Takaya's popular shoujo series. The manga, set at 2-3 volumes, takes place at Kaibara High School after Tohru has graduated, and follows a young girl, Sawa, who has just started. While the original cast of characters won't feature directly, they'll be mentioned in passing. It'll be serialised on the Japanese website HanaLaLa, starting September 4th, with new chapters published every Friday.

OSOMATSU-SAN Anime Honours 'Gag Manga King'

It's been 27 years since the classic 1962-69 gag manga **Osomatsu-kun** was last adapted into anime form, and now Studio Pierrot has announced a brand new series. Titled **Osomatsu-san**, it commemorates what would have been the 80th birthday of 'Gag Manga King' Fujio Akatsuka, who passed away in 2008. It follows the now adult sextuplets, with Takahiro Sakurai (Code Geass) in the titular role, alongside other notable voice actors, including **K**'s Daisuke Ono, **Fairy Tail**'s Yuichi Nakamura and **Kingdom Hearts**' Miyu Irino. **Gintama**'s Yoichi Fujita will be directing with **Saint Young Men**'s Naoyuki Asano overseeing character designs.

THE LATEST RELEASES REVIEWED AND RATED

REVIEWS

CAPTAIN EARTH - PART 1

DVD / CERT: 15 / DIRECTOR: TAKUYA IGARASHI / SCREENPLAY: YOJI ENOKIDO / STARRING: MIYU IRINO, HIROSHI KAMIYA, AI KAYANO, KOTORI KOIWAI, RINA HIDAKA / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

For anyone outside of the anime loop and looking in, giant fighting robots are what it's all about. There is some truth to that, with the mech subgenre effectively serving as the backbone, and every new season usually packs one mech effort. Captain Earth is a tepid entry, with enough interesting ideas to keep it ticking over.

Second year lickspittle Manatsu Daichi is questioning his place in the world and his lot in life, staring down the inevitability of adulthood. His dad died in mysterious circumstances, and the only comfort is the knowledge that it was an act of heroism.

When a strange circular rainbow appears over the island Tanegashima, speculation and rumour grip the country. But for Daichi, it brings him back to childhood where he first crossed paths with Teppei Arashi, an odd boy from the other side of a security fence. Recognising the rainbow as the same singularity that Teppei himself produced, Daichi makes his way back to the military island complex. After an alarm sounds the impending arrival of invading aliens Kill-T-Gang, he chances his way to Captain status and seems to have a fundamental understanding control of the mech, Earth Engine Impactor.

Globe, the enigmatic defence organisation, teams Daichi with likeminded and similarly willed individuals to form the Midsummer Knights to combat the aliens. Teppei, Daichi discovers, is a former Kill-T-Gang member whose memories were wiped and whose consciousness was stowed away in the body of a teenage boy. The daughter of the base commander, Akari Yomatsuri, is a quirky hacker and self-proclaimed 'Magic Girl'. Peculiar Hana Mutou and her sidekick critter Pitz, are inexplicably connected to the ship Blume.

Writer Yōji Enokido doesn't plumb the same depth as the scripts he penned for Neon Genesis Evangelion, and that's symptomatic of the entire series. The animation is good but not great, the characters are fun but unmemorable. There are some cunning ideas, but it hasn't got anything on the intelligence of Gargantia on the Verdurous Planet. The brash mech combat isn't as good as Knights of Sidonia, and not nearly as much fun as Full Metal Panic. There's plenty of brazen sequences, especially the elaborate transformations where the central part of the mech flies through space gates and combines with its limbs. The end result looks like it just zipped out of any of the myriad Gundam series.

Episode 5 makes a change of pace and setting with some slow burn espionage aboard Globe's space station Tenkaido. It's an all too brief detour from the bulk of the series, but a reminder of its potential. Part 1 might not inspire you to fork out for the next instalment, but there's enough here to enjoy.

Extras: *Clean opening and closing / Trailers*

DOMINIC CUTHBERT

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DRAGON BALL Z KAI - SEASON 1

BD / CERT: 12 / YASUHIRO NOWATARI / SCREENPLAY: VARIOUS / STARRING: MASAKO NOZAWA, HIROMI TSURU, HIKARU MIDORIKAWA, HIROKO EMORI / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Dragon Ball Z Kai is the trip down memory lane that fans have been waiting for, and this revamped, remastered, recut version doesn't disappoint. Finally hitting shelves after its first showing in 2009, the first series of DBZ Kai contains the entire Saiyan Saga, exploring our hero Goku's struggles with a Saiyan attack on Earth. For fans of the original Dragon Ball Z anime, seeing those all-too-familiar faces and storylines in glorious high definition is certainly worth the wait.

DBZ Kai is subtly different enough from the original 1980s cartoon to provide something new for even the most hardcore fan. With its audio rerecords, remastered footage, and with a few scenes having been entirely redrawn, this is the first time in which the initial saga of Goku can be seen in all its glory. DBZ Kai benefits from the cutting of a lot of filler side stories that really did little to add to the series as a whole, only making this version that little bit more enjoyable. The sound and the HD visuals make for an exciting watch, never taking away from the original joys of the show. Although the redrawn scenes look fantastic and are reminiscent of the visuals of the latest DBZ movies, their random insertion into the middle of epic battles or tense moments can be a little jarring, especially when the next thing you see is the crude-yet-lovable art style that we're used to.

For those not familiar with the DBZ universe, the collection of 26 episodes may seem a little... off. Without giving away any spoilers, DBZ Kai Season 1 ends on an odd note, at a point that makes you check that there isn't one more disc that you've missed. This isn't a fault with the collection, but more with the show's pacing, which doesn't have a well-defined end to the Saiyan Saga.

Although featuring a handful of lacklustre and, well, boring extras, DBZ Kai Season 1 is a brilliant revisit to a world loved by millions of anime fans, and should be a part of every anime fan's collection.

Extras: *Textless opening and closing songs / Trailers*

LARA BROWN

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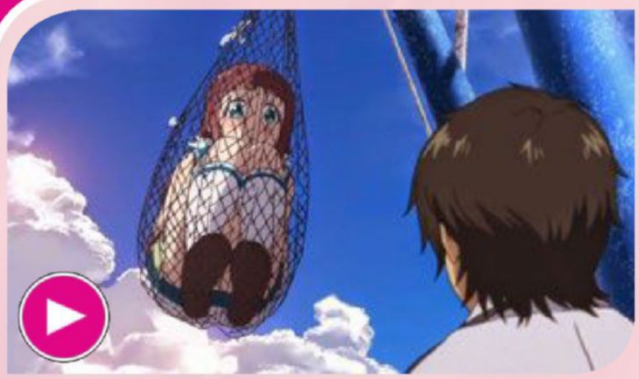


A LULL IN THE SEA - PART 1

DVD / CERT: 12 / DIRECTOR: TOSHIYA SHINOHARA / SCREENPLAY: MARI OKADA / STARRING: NATSUKI HANAE, MAX MITTELMAN, KANA HANAZAWA, MICHELLE RUFF, BRIANNA KNICKERBOCKER / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

After their school closes, sea dwellers Sakishima Hikari, Mukaido Manaka, Hiradaira Chisaki and Isaki Kaname are forced to rub shoulders with the land dwellers. Their creation myth begins the same way; all humans once lived in the sea, but there were those that longed for the land and cast off their protective ena. In the centuries since, prejudices have formed on both sides of the societal divide, with the surface and sea people calling each other pigs and fish, respectively. It isn't long after integration and setting aside their few differences that apocalyptic rumblings start shaking, and a calamity that'll affect both ecosystems closes in.

Both cultures are fully realised, but the underwater mecca of Shioshishio, like a sunken Grecian city, is majestic in design and indicative of a society with a distinct past, flourishing present and a future every bit as uncertain as our own. Life on land is just as detailed, with the setting evoking contemporary Japan mixed in with the fantastical. Crucially, the setting looks used and lived in, and only adds to the sense that we're watching a handful of a hundred stories play out.

Instead of coddling the viewer with exposition early on, A Lull in the Sea chucks you in at the deep end and drip feeds the details. In lesser hands, perhaps the series wouldn't have had the same resonance or emotional impact, but screenwriter Mari Okada gradually introduces the many characters, making the viewer feel more a part of the protagonists' tight knit group than a passive observer. There are some blanket explanations, and the occasional need to stop and explain plot points, but by the half way point, their drama is your drama and their tears are your tears.

Hikari is on the cusp of manhood and dealing with the anger and excitement of adolescence, where every emotion is too big for your body. He's not particularly attentive, but his unending love for his friends and family is meant well but misdirected. More than any of the other characters, he's caught between the views of the older generation and the reality of being a middle schooler on land. It's this generational divide that's at the heart of the series and provides the narrative kick. Manaka, on the other hand, is easily embarrassed, with a sheepish attitude that no doubt extends from so many humiliating experiences. It's not that she's awkward that curries so much pathos, but because she's the lynchpin of the family unit and takes on their pain and failings. Her trajectory, even in this first curve, outshines any other in complexity and depth. She's first introduced to land dweller Tsumugu Kihara after he accidentally catches her in a fishing net, sparking a Capulet/Montague romance (minus the underage sex and suicide, of course). Counterpointing her self-consciousness, he's introspective and intuitive and fascinated with all things Shioshishio.

The slow burn plot is married with one of the most beautiful examples of animation. The characters are exquisitely rendered, but it's the attention to background detail that sells the awe-inspiring backdrops, whether it's reflections, the glimmering ena or the undulating jelly fish that swim into frame. Even the English dub is up to snuff. Toshiya Shinohara's direction coupled with the delicate acoustic score makes A Lull in the Sea a wondrous, unconventional and heart-warming journey. And that's just the first half.

Extras: *Clean opening and ending / Bonus Episode 14 / Trailers*

DOMINIC CUTHBERT

8

ONE PIECE: COLLECTION 11

DVD / CERT: 12 / DIRECTOR: KONOSUKE UDA / SCREENPLAY: VARIOUS / STARRING: AKEMI OKAMURA, HIROAKI HIRATA, IKUE OHTANI, KAPPEI YAMAGUCHI / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

One Piece: Collection 11 covers episodes 253 – 275, half of which finishes off the Water 7 arc started in the previous ensemble.

After the moribund events, the climax is far from fulfilling, with The Straw Hat Pirates racing after the secretive CP9 and willing captive Robin in a prototype fly-by-night sea train. Meanwhile, Franky, Usopp and Sanji (who make a great team, incidentally) go from carriage to carriage, knocking off the small fry and taking out periodically tough baddies, as if it were a dungeon crawler. Episodes here dwell on events longer than they ought to, with the gap between filler and functionality widening. Sanji's fight against rival chef and nut job Ramen Kempo, who, like his name suggests, fights with noodles, is spread over three episodes when even one was pushing it. Usopp dons the Sniper King façade with an infectious theme song and rapturous gags, to side-step his recent departure from the Straw Hats. Luffy, meanwhile, encounters various adversaries and obstacles along the tracks, but their rescue mission won't be deterred.

Episode 264 sees the start of the Enies Lobby arc, centred on the titular night-less island with its impressive and physics-defying geography. It might be a contentious point as to whether the arc is a separate entity or an extension of Water 7; in whatever case, both fall under the same umbrella saga and make for one of the series' utmost periods. It continues the same trend of evocative and moody storytelling, but is much more action-orientated than Water 7, leaving little breathing room in the persistent barrage of fight sequences. It's an arc that sees all the Straw Hats getting stronger and honing their abilities. There's really only one way to test them out, and the proof is in the punches.

Together with the Franky Family, the pirates' battle through the island's various defences, and it's rinse and repeat until the collection closer. The final episode offers a revealing and unlikely look into Robin's fraught past, leaving, like its predecessor, the arc unfinished. While you might feel cheated, the cliff hanger and choice of quality dubs will have you shelling out for the next instalment anyway. Fans, however, already know the best is yet to come, with the latter half of the arc boasting plenty of pivotal moments.

Extras: *Opening animation / Closing animation / Audio commentaries / Behind the scenes featurette*

DOMINIC CUTHBERT

7

When Titans Attack!

Unless you've been walled off from the rest of the world without internet access, you've probably heard of Japanese cult hit *Attack on Titan*. Or maybe not; despite its cult following and imminent live action movie, *Attack on Titan* isn't quite a household name in the UK. But it soon will be. The trailers and stills look amazing; post-apocalyptic humans fighting horrid giants, using a mix of high-tech and renaissance technology? Sounds unique.

Attack on Titan is about the last remnants of mankind, huddled together in one massive city, which is supported by three massive concentric walls. Why has this happened? Because enormous man-like creatures called Titans now roam the Earth. The Titans are remorseless, near un-killable creatures that look just enough like people to be very creepy. They devour any human they find, not for food but for fun. Worse still, they come in different sizes and varieties; some are even skinless. The only way to hurt them is to stab them in the right place near the head.

The central plot follows Eren Yeager, an angry young man who desperately wants to kill as many Titans as possible in order to avenge his dead mother. He's assisted by his foster sister Mikasa Ackerman, and their friend Armin Arlert. The three friends join the Survey Corps, an elite group of soldiers who fight Titans outside the walls using high-tech gear and special training. In order to deal with such a massive foe, the corp use hi-tech rigs called Omni-directional Mobility Gear that allow soldiers to swing from rooftop to rooftop via cables.

If all that sounds incredible, it may make more sense when you realise that *Attack on Titan* began life as a Japanese comic strip for manga publisher Kodansha. Writer Hajime Isayama drew inspiration from his home town as well as various pop culture icons, including wrestling star Brock Lesnar (whom one of the Titans is based on). It was originally meant to be a one-shot with everyone getting killed off at the end; however it proved to be so popular that Isayama decided to carry on. Its bleak vibe, gore and nihilistic tone seems to be the reason people like it so much. It is Japan's most popular Manga to date, surpassing the previous record holder, *One Piece*.

In addition to various comic strip spin-offs, including a romantic comedy version set in high school, the core story has also been converted to other forms of media. This includes 'light novels', which are novellas with many illustrations. These books fill in much of the background of *Attack on Titan*'s world, and build on the pseudo-fantasy setting, filling in the gaps and explaining some of the franchise's 18th century-style technology and European aesthetics. Text heavy video games, also known as 'visual novels', have also been produced, and these feature the main characters from the series. A strategy game and phone app also came out.

The inevitable animated TV series emerged soon after. It follows the story of the graphic novels quite closely (though obviously they are different media so they tell the story in different ways). The show has been redubbed by North American anime factory FUNimation and it's very loyal to the original Japanese in terms of casting and style. The hardcore fans have certainly been pleased with the dub, which is pretty rare. Two 'movie' versions have also been released, which tell a compressed version of the TV series. These are also very well done, trimming the fat of the leisurely-paced animated series, and are actually a good entry point to the show. All of this has led to a worldwide cult following; in 2014 and 2015, one of the more common cosplays at European and American conventions were *Attack on Titan*'s famous Survey Corp.

The forthcoming live action movie looks very, very promising. For a start, they've gotten the look of the series almost exactly right. The cast look spot on, right down to rough and ready uniforms and the steel and leather of the mobility rigs. Although relatively unknown in Europe and the UK, all the actors are well regarded performers in their native Japan. Most of the series' large ensemble cast seem to be represented as well; there are a few notable exceptions, mostly the slightly extraneous and more exotic characters.

The plot also appears to follow the source material; it will focus on Eren and his journey. The movie will be split into two parts, and if successful, this could well be the start of a long-running series. It promises to be louder, creepier and darker than the previous adaptations, and that's going to be pretty impressive if they can pull it off; this is a story about the near extinction of mankind, after all. We have high hopes for this strange looking movie. If they get it right, this will be a classic.

ED FORTUNE

ATTACK ON TITAN is released in Asian territories in August. No UK release date has been set as yet.

COSPLAY CATWALK

A MONTHLY FOCUS ON THE COSTUMED ROLE-PLAY SCENE AT FAN CONVENTIONS AROUND THE WORLD

Credit: AMW Photography - Leo Chell - Alice Di Trolio - Dave Chapman

Cosplay is one of the most important parts of modern fandom, particularly when it comes to attracting younger people into the worlds of comics, anime, film, and sci-fi/horror. Conventions used to be full of stallholders selling their wares and celebrities signing. Now, more so than ever, they are a meeting place for like-minded souls who love to dress up and celebrate their collective passion.

As a taster for a new regular feature, we chat to popular cosplayer Tors Webster, who makes and designs costumes through her company OddTogs...

STARBURST: How did you get into Cosplay?
Tors Webster: My gateway to fandom was the original series of *Star Trek*. I grew up with it as a child and never really grew out of playing dress up. Then I went to my first *Buffy* convention in 2000, met some people there who were doing Xena conventions and a character was suggested to me - Discord, Goddess of Chaos! I gave it a shot and it kind of exploded from there.

How has the community changed since you started?
So much. It's so much bigger, for one. With the explosion of the Internet, we now have an international community, where something you do today in England can be discussed tomorrow in Australia. It means that there is a wealth of inspiration and talent immediately available. We're no longer trying to figure things out on our own; if you need to learn how to do something, there is probably a tutorial on it somewhere.

It also means that the negative side - the bullying, the trolls - is bigger too, but so is the support group. Things like 'Cosplay is not Consent' and 'I Cosplay' are really important as they note a real change in the community - it used to be that poor attitude was just something you had to put up with. Now there is this massive support group, both online and more and more on the convention floor,

Credit: Wiggz

who are ready to jump in to help. That's beautiful to see.

How important is attention to detail?
For me, it's something I like to concentrate on. That's part of the joy. For others, not important at all, unless it's important to them. There is no right or wrong way to Cosplay, if it makes you happy; unless you're trying to join a club where accuracy is crucial.

What has been your most challenging costume?
Judge Anderson from *Dredd*! She was painful, even with help and even with buying in pieces like armour plating! It's something I love knowing though: that virtually every Judge has at some point had to make or assemble part of their 2012 costume and has sworn at it just as much as I did. There's solidarity there with that shared pain.

What's your creative process?
Cosplay starts with love at first sight. If I see it and think 'Oh my god yes!' then I'm onto a winner. Sometimes it'll be something from years ago, from childhood, other times new pieces. It has to start with excitement for a costume, a character or group. Otherwise there's no fun.

Then it's all about the reference. I have a board in my studio for current projects, past memories and future 'I wish' cosplays; inspirational pictures or people, all sorts. I try not to buy substitutes where possible, buying the right thing first time saves money, but can take time to find. Then it's usually the making stage, consisting of bleeding, swearing, crying, giving up, and finally wearing it at a convention.

How important is 'getting into the role?'
For me it's important, because it's fun. With Judge Anderson, I wanted to get things like gun stance right so I learned. When I see a shot and I've got it right, I'm proud of that. One of the things I do with costume is as a character entertainer with the Galactic Knights, collecting for various charities or providing entertainment at events. With that, performance is important to sell the character. One of my most popular pieces of the last year is Daphne from Scooby Doo, and we always get kids asking about Scooby. So I have photos on my phone from a photoshoot we did with a Great Dane and a Mystery Machine. Small things like that sell character and make memories.

What advice do you have for new cosplayers?
Do something you love. Learn to sew. Come bleed with the rest of us because there is nothing like this hobby!

Tors Webster can be found on oddtogs.co.uk.

Words: Ed Fortune

Credit: AMW Photography

Credit: Food & Cosplay

Are you a cosplayer and want to see your work featured in STARBURST?

Drop us an email at *cosplay@starburstmagazine.com* and we'll print our favourites every month, with a prize for the Star Picture!

PIXEL JUICE

NEWS AND PREVIEWS IN GAMING BY LEE PRICE

Arnie to Star in WWE 2K16

Wrestling isn't usually a domain that STARBURST strays into all that often, but this one is just a little bit too weird to let fly. Apparently, Arnold Schwarzenegger is going to be made available as a playable character in the latest WWE game (when you pre-order). Better yet, he will actually be turning up as the Terminator, rather than himself - as witnessed in the rather cool TV spot currently running.

Arnie has quite the history with WWE, so much so that he has even been inducted into their Hall of Fame. Even so, this still seems like a little bit of an odd move, but there are probably plenty of people who are going to relish the chance of playing as him and taking out a few of the current crop of WWE stars.

Plus, the game could use the celebrity firepower after the scandal that Hulk Hogan found himself embroiled in last month.

COMING SOON

STAR WARS: THE OLD REPUBLIC - KNIGHTS OF THE FALLEN EMPIRE

PLATFORM: PC

RELEASE DATE: OCTOBER 27TH

October is filled to the brim with great game releases, but we're willing to bet that STARBURST fans will be most intrigued by this expansion for the superb Old Republic. A third faction is going to be introduced and BioWare are promising that all of your choices will have an enormous impact on the outcome of the story. There is simply no way that fans can allow themselves to miss this.

COMING SOON

ROCK BAND 4

PLATFORM: PS4, XBOX ONE

RELEASE DATE: OCTOBER 6TH

It's been a long time coming, but it looks like the rhythm genre is trying to come back with a bang after oversaturation damn near killed the market a few years back. Both Harmonix and Activision are bringing their flagship music games back, with Rock Band 4 getting out there first. Does anybody still want to play along to music using plastic instruments? Only time will tell, but we don't anticipate the return of the boom period that seemed to lead to a new music game coming out every ten minutes a few years back.

SHENMUE 3 Kickstarter Breaks Records

Well, the Kickstarter is over and many fans are waiting for Yu Suzuki and company to set up a PayPal donation site so that more funding can be gathered, but it is official – we are getting **Shenmue 3**.

The series, which has been in hibernation for the better part of 14 years, is one of the most beloved in all of gaming and boasts a rabid army of fans who have been dying to get their hands on a third title ever since that weird cave scene that concluded the second game.

After raising its base target in less than 24 hours, becoming the fastest videogame to break the million dollar barrier in Kickstarter's history, **Shenmue 3** went on to collect more than $6.3 million. This makes it the most highly-funded videogame ever to be put on the platform.

Of course, we are still going to have to wait until the tail end of 2017 to see a finished product, but there is finally a light at the end of the tunnel for **Shenmue** fans.

Videogame Theme Park may be Coming to Orlando

Recent reports are suggesting that Universal may be considering creating a videogame-themed amusement park to go along with the range of other attractions that they have dotted around Florida, with the likelihood being that it would place a heavy focus on works by Nintendo and Blizzard.

There's nothing concrete just yet, but Nintendo announced a partnership with Universal back in May that allowed the company to bring a number of Nintendo-themed attractions to Universal Studios. However, scuttlebutt is that too many attractions have been developed for the children's area alone, leading Universal to consider opening a separate park.

Quite where Blizzard fits in is less certain, but the rumours suggest an attraction based on the **Warcraft** universe may be being discussed. Regardless, either one would make for a great experience for fans of the respective companies.

'Dramatic' Changes Coming to FINAL FANTASY VII Remake

The director of the upcoming **FFVII** remake, Tetsuya Nomura, has a tough job at hand, what with having to please an insatiable fanbase, but he may have gotten off on the wrong foot by announcing that there will be dramatic changes made to the gameplay of the eagerly-awaited remake.

While some changes are going to have to happen, we predict there will be an uproar if Nomura decides to replace the ATB system with something more akin to what is used in the newer **Final Fantasy** games. After all, many people are excited for **FFVII** because it will throwback to the days when JRPGs, particularly those produced by Square, weren't desperately crawling all over themselves to appeal to western gamers. Only time will tell, and hopefully these 'dramatic' changes work out for the better.

COMING SOON

GUITAR HERO LIVE

PLATFORM: MULTIPLE
RELEASE DATE: OCTOBER 23RD

You just can't have one without the other, so a new Guitar Hero is set to release almost alongside Rock Band 4. Live sees something of a departure from the original formula, with the ability to play along to music videos being touted as the biggest feature that Activision are hoping will hook in new players. Whether older players are going to be willing to occupy their homes with a new set of instruments is another question entirely, but Activision may also have to worry about Rock Band coming out a few weeks ahead of their own franchise.

COMING SOON

ASSASSIN'S CREED SYNDICATE

PLATFORM: PS4, XBOX ONE, PC
RELEASE DATE: OCTOBER 23RD

Assassin's Creed is back once again, which is sure to delight people who want a glitchy gaming experience that still doesn't offer all that much beyond what the second game came out with. Okay, so that might be a tad cynical, but there are an awful lot of gamers who got burned last year for being early adopters of an Assassin's Creed game, so Ubisoft best have their act together for Syndicate. You'll get what you expect, which is all you need if you're a fan.

RESIDENT EVIL 2 Remake in the Pipeline?

It is fondly remembered as one of Capcom's crowning achievements, at least in the **Resident Evil** series, and now it looks like the developer may be considering creating a remake of **Resident Evil 2** for newer consoles.

The rumours got started when Capcom's R&D Division quizzed fans of the **Resident Evil** Facebook page about whether they would be interested in a revamped version of the second game in the series. The response could be best described as 'positive', which will hopefully put the wheels in motion for work to begin.

Anybody who played the **Resident Evil 1** remake on the Gamecube will know just how awesome this could turn out to be, and it appears that Capcom recently experienced quite a bit of success with the HD re-release of that game a few months back. However, doing the same for **Resi 2** would essentially require building the game from scratch again, as Capcom don't have a pre-existing remake to work from.

STREET FIGHTER V Beta Postponed

Capcom conjured up a lot of good will with the announcement that **Street Fighter V** would have earnable DLC, allowing players who don't want to fork out any extra money to get additional characters and game modes by being good at the game instead.

However, some of that may have been tempered with the announcement that, as of this writing, the **Street Fighter V** beta has been postponed indefinitely.

After a difficult start, the beta was taken offline only a couple of hours after it was made available on the PlayStation Network, with Capcom offering the following explanation on the Capcom-Unity blog: "*Capcom offers its sincerest apologies to everyone who participated in this first beta test. While the purpose of a beta is to work out these type of issues, it was very clear that the issues we faced were more severe than we were prepared for. After three days of testing, while we were making progress and collecting valuable data, we felt the majority of players were not having a good experience, and the best course of action would be to take the servers offline for extended maintenance. We will be postponing our first beta phase until we believe the experience is going to be a positive one for players.*"

On the one hand, this is a fairly admirable move, but it is still disappointing and points to problems potentially in development that could lead to a delay in the game's release.

Del Toro and Kojima to Collaborate On New Project

The cancellation of **Silent Hills** was a body blow for survival horror fans, especially because **P.T.** did such a great job of leaving many a brown stain in pants.

Still, despite Konami's insistence on treating people like dirt this year, it looks like people who were excited about what a collaboration between Guillermo del Toro and Hideo Kojima could bring to the table will still have something to get their teeth into, as it looks like the pair are going to collaborate on something outside of the **Silent Hill** franchise.

Nothing concrete has been announced just yet, but del Toro has stated that the pair are working on something. We can't wait to see what it is.

China Lifts Ban on Consoles

For about 15 years, it has been impossible to buy a videogame console in China, as they were made illegal due to the Ministry of Culture fearing they would have a negative impact on children.

The wheels were put in motion to overturn the ban a couple of years ago and it is now finally official – consoles can go on sale in China.

Sony, Nintendo and Microsoft are likely going to be jumping at the chance to expand into such an enormous market, so it will be interesting to see who comes out on top. Microsoft tends to not do well in Asian markets, but it is possible that the past relationship between China and Japan could lead to potential gamers leaning towards Microsoft's products instead.

COMING SOON

UNCHARTED: THE NATHAN DRAKE COLLECTION

PLATFORM: PS4

RELEASE DATE: OCTOBER 9TH

If there's one thing that can keep things ticking over when a console is still relatively new and has little in the way of great software available, it is re-releasing classic games. Uncharted is getting the treatment soon, which is handy timing for those who missed out on Nathan Drake's adventures the first time around, but not ideal for those who just want A Thief's End in their console. Still, if you have yet to play the games, then this is a must-have, particularly because the second is widely regarded as one of the best games of its generation.

COMING SOON

HALO 5: GUARDIANS

PLATFORM: XBOX ONE

RELEASE DATE: OCTOBER 27TH

The fifth game in the Halo trilogy (huh?), Halo 5 will bring Spartan Locke into the fray to share top billing with Master Chief. Regardless of whether or not you feel the series is getting a little bit stale these days, the Halo games can still be relied upon for some decent shooting action, plus the expanded mythology is worth getting into for fans of that sort of thing. This is a big one for Microsoft though, as Xbox's killer franchise is aiming to set its stall out and win back some disillusioned fans.

Will Metroid Make it to the Wii U?

It looks like the Wii U is fast going the way of the Dodo, what with Nintendo openly working on a new console following very disappointing sales. Now it looks even more certain that it's on its way, as Nintendo of America executive Scott Moffitt has claimed he has no idea if there are any plans to bring the **Metroid** series to the ailing format.

The news comes following some complaints that the next in the series is going to be a 3DS only affair, with Moffitt stating: "***Metroid** is really up to our game developers to decide how best to create new and different experiences. Federation Force offers a local multiplayer feature that could be a lot of fun for game fans and we hope fans try it out and come to their own conclusions.*"

In short, it looks like there will be no **Metroid** for the Wii U, which is sure to leave the console's owners a little unhappy. Being told to be "*happy for what we have*" is probably not going to do a whole lot to make them feel better either.

THE LATEST GAMING RELEASES REVIEWED AND RATED

REVIEWS

BATMAN: ARKHAM KNIGHT – BATGIRL: A MATTER OF FAMILY (DLC)

DEVELOPER: ROCKSTEADY STUDIOS / PUBLISHER: WARNER BROS. INTERACTIVE ENTERTAINMENT / PLATFORM: PS4, XBOX ONE, PC / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

By now, gamers and Batfans should have had time to finish and soak in the events of Batman: Arkham Knight. With the Knight unmasked, nemeses defeated and the Riddler still hiding underground in his stupid Aliens-esque contraption (let's be honest, he'll stay there for most of us, beyond the most avid Riddle-seekers and completists), many will be looking for their next Arkham fix.

Said fix has arrived in the form of Batgirl: A Matter of Family, a story-led prequel in which Batgirl (Barbara Gordon, pre-Killing Joke) and Robin (shaven-headed Tim Drake) rescue kidnapped GCPD officers from Joker's funland. For a dead guy, The Joker sure does get about still. It's an odd choice of villain, given how much of Arkham Knight was devoted to putting the Clown Prince of Crime to rest once and for all, but the franchise never has been particularly imaginative with its villains.

With Commissioner Gordon (Jonathan Banks, still sounding like Jonathan Banks) in the firing line and Batman nowhere to be seen, Batgirl and Robin must battle their way through a bad-guy-packed amusement park, all the way to their inevitable confrontation with The Joker and Harley Quinn. Batgirl's name is in the title, though, and it's Batgirl who you'll spend most of your time with – like he was in Arkham Knight, the Boy Wonder is playable only during the big battles, allowing for dual takedowns and quick-fire switching between characters.

A few less gadgets and a vastly decreased life bar aside though, you'd be hard-pressed to see any real difference in the gameplay. Batgirl plays almost exactly like mentor Batman, save for slightly differing animations and maybe a little extra speed. The costume looks good though (the bulky ears are a nice touch), the flowing red hair and spots of yellow consistent with how she's generally looked throughout the years. She's not the only one looking good: A Matter of Family brings back the traditional domino outfit for Harley Quinn – a lovely change from whatever stupid getup she usually ends up wearing everywhere else these days.

There's no free-roaming, no side missions and no vehicles: at roughly an hour's gameplay, A Matter of Family is short, stripped back and largely free of invention. Rescuing the cops from Joker's funhouse contraptions is fun, but players shouldn't expect much from the game. Even Barbara's technical know-how is underutilised – literally all she gets to do is disarm a few bombs and set off a few traps, using exactly the same hacking device as Batman. It seems to take her longer too, so evidently she'll need to get a bit more practice in before becoming computer genius Oracle.

Finishing on an enjoyably satisfying fistfight, A Matter of Family does what it does well enough, but that's about it. There's none of the father/daughter drama the promotional imagery led us to expect (Gordon pulling a gun on Batgirl!) nor any changes or additions to the Arkham mythos that might have justified this empty-headed little tale. This Bat-family affair is a story that ultimately doesn't, well, matter.

JOEL HARLEY

6

RETRO BYTES

A LOOK BACK AT THE WORLD OF RETRO GAMING BY CHRIS JACKSON

AND IN THE RETRO CORNER...

Hello! You're joining us on a rather special occasion, as this month Retro Bytes is introducing a brand new feature! That two-part wrestling special we did a few months ago seemed to go down quite well, so we thought it might be nice to have a chat with some wrestlers about the games of yesteryear. If anything, it'll be nice to have someone else doing the talking for a while, won't it? The debut instalment of 'Retro Fights!' is coming up very soon, but first here's a couple of completely unrelated gaming recommendations to keep you going over the next few weeks.

WIREHEAD (SEGA CD, 1995)

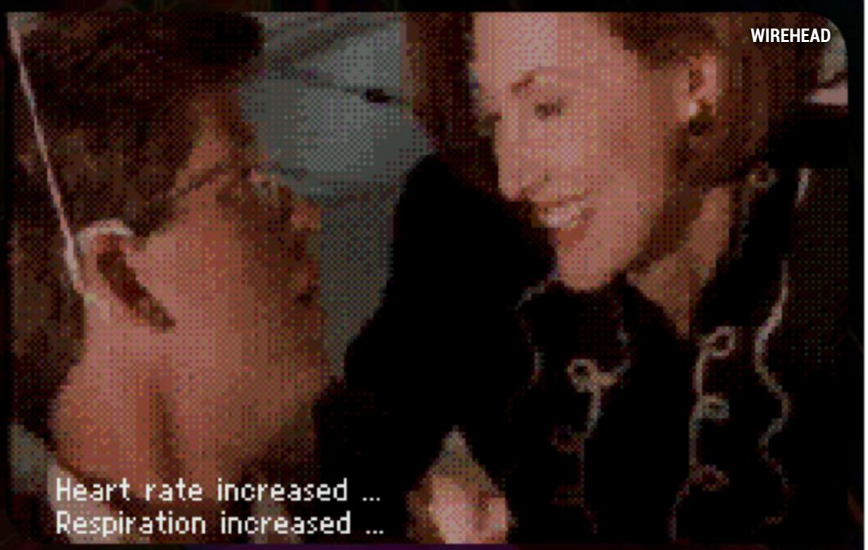
We're all familiar with *Dragon's Lair*, right? The boundary-busting interactive cartoon that had players hopelessly pressing random buttons in the hope that they might be able to avoid falling into a pit of fire or being strangled by a snake or whatever. Twelve years later, taking its cues directly from *Dragon's Lair*, came one of the final titles to be released for the Sega CD. But this isn't a cartoon - what we have here is a genuine completely interactive full-motion movie-game!

Ned Hubbard has got a remote control receiver implanted in his brain. We're not sure why, but we'll just have to accept it. He receives a video message from a Dr. Oja, who informs us that a nefarious villain has sent a pack of goons to look for Ned and take his remote device. And wouldn't you just know it - as soon as the video ends, there's a knock on Ned's front door...

It's a ridiculous idea for a game/movie, but it seems the developers, scriptwriters and actors were all in on the joke as they went all-out on including as many absurd scenarios as their budget would allow. Frequent sideways glances and winks towards the player are accompanied by endless pratfalls and scenes of total slapstick carnage, all knowingly acted to perfection by a cast who appear to be having the times of their lives. It's not all fun and games though - there are a couple of moments where some genuinely harrowing stuff goes down, which can be quite distressing when you're in the middle of enjoying yourself!

The gameplay involves nothing more than pressing a directional button as soon as the prompts appear on screen. Pressing the correct button will advance the story, but get it wrong and all manner of unexpected things could happen! It's a simple premise, but there is one pretty big flaw in that it's rarely clear which button you need to actually press. With three or four possibilities each time, it really becomes a matter of trying out every button and memorising which ones do the job if you want to get further through the game.

The script and actors more than hold up their end of the bargain though, to the point where the limited gameplay really isn't an issue. All you'll be interested in is seeing what's going to happen next, and even when you get it wrong you're probably going to find yourself being entertained in some way by whatever unfortunate situation poor Ned finds himself in. There are car chases, explosions, encounters with wild bears, shoot-outs, and even a hot and steamy bathroom scene, all brought to life by a cast whose collective credits include *Quantum Leap*, *Mad Men*, *The Wolf of Wall Street*, *Pearl Harbour* and



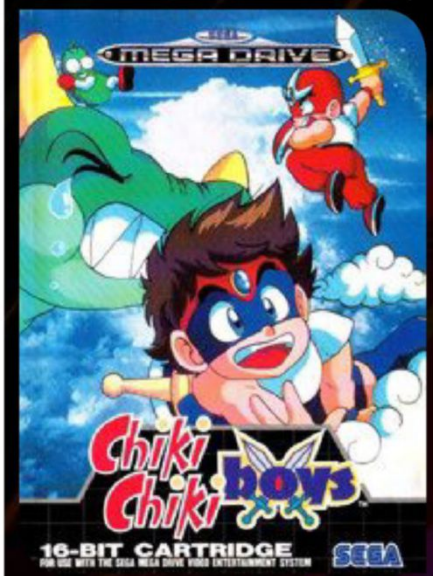
WIREHEAD

countless other well-known movies and sitcoms. Seriously, if you watch a lot of TV, *Wirehead* is absolutely incredible for a game of "*Ooh, What's He/She From? That's Going to Annoy Me for the Rest of the Day*". It's an incredible game (movie?) full stop to be honest, and it's one of the rare titles that's as much fun to watch someone else play as it is to have a go yourself. Well done, *Wirehead*!

CHIKI CHIKI BOYS AKA "MEGA TWINS" (MEGA DRIVE, 1992)

At first glance, *Chiki Chiki Boys* looks like a fairly standard side-scrolling platformer. Players choose between one of two available characters, travelling over land, sea, and sky on a mission to find the Dragon Eye Stones and defeat the invading hordes. The route to and through the final boss's lair makes up the second half of the game and features some endearingly ridiculous mini-boss fights, including one that only seems to end when you manage to steal your opponent's underwear!

The cutesy brightly-coloured enemies and environments mean that it would be pretty easy to dismiss this as a game for children, but it really is an outstandingly playable title. What really makes *Chiki Chiki Boys* stand out from the hundreds of other adventure/platform games is that everything you see and do in the game is just so very satisfying. There really aren't any low points to speak of at all, and with each level taking place in a different setting, the game doesn't give itself any opportunities to become boring. Helping to keep things interesting, 'magic bombs' can be purchased and weapons can be upgraded at the end of each level to ensure you've always got something new to play with. Thanks to its inclusion in several arcade compilations on the PSP, PS2 and Xbox, it isn't a difficult one to get hold of these days. Highly recommended for fans of mindlessly enjoyable platforming!



RETRO FIGHTS!

The current TCW Open Champion and ICE Heavyweight Champion, SEAN ONLY, is known as the most dangerous man in British wrestling, but he's also quite a big fan of videogames when he's not behaving like a psychopath and kicking people's heads off...

STARBURST: First things first, take us through your gaming history.
Sean Only: My earliest gaming memory involves me and my older sister using an overly complicated manual to program games into a ZX Spectrum. It was nothing more exciting than *Frogger* and *Chess*, but it blew my tiny mind at the time! After that, I remember a Dragon 32 being around somewhere, and playing the first NES *Mario* game at a friend's house. The first console I ever got was a Game Boy, I believe it was a Christmas present. Being the inventive/resourceful young chap I was, I used the classified ads in games magazines to trade systems in when I got bored of them. Despite only ever owning a Game Boy 'new', I managed to go through a NES, Master System and eventually Mega Drive. Since reaching adulthood, I've owned most of the mainstream consoles and handhelds, from the PS1 and N64 to the 360 and PS3. Due to my schedule, I've not got round to picking up a current gen system yet, but it seems pretty inevitable.

Was there anything you missed out on that you've got around to playing/owning in later life?
Funnily enough, I just picked up a Neo Geo X the other day. Like most people my age, owning (or even playing on) a Neo Geo during its original run was a ridiculous pipe dream. I'd consider it a pretty frivolous purchase by my standards, but it's absolutely boss. *Metal Slug* stands the test of time amazingly well. A lot of the games do, to be honest. There's certainly some stinkers in there, but that's to be expected.

What are your all-time favourite games?
I'll have to set myself a limit as to how many I'm gonna mention or we'll be here all day! All time fave is, without a doubt, the original *Resident Evil*. I honestly don't think anything has touched it since, in terms of the survival horror genre, or just games in general. I played through it again on the recent HD version, and it really confirmed the love I have for it! I think the game I've probably spent the most time on over the years is *Tetris*. It was the only game I owned for ages during the Game Boy era, and I still haven't got sick of it to this day. Other than that, I've always been a sucker for the *Tony Hawk* franchise and I was a huge fan of the *Shinobi* games as a kid.

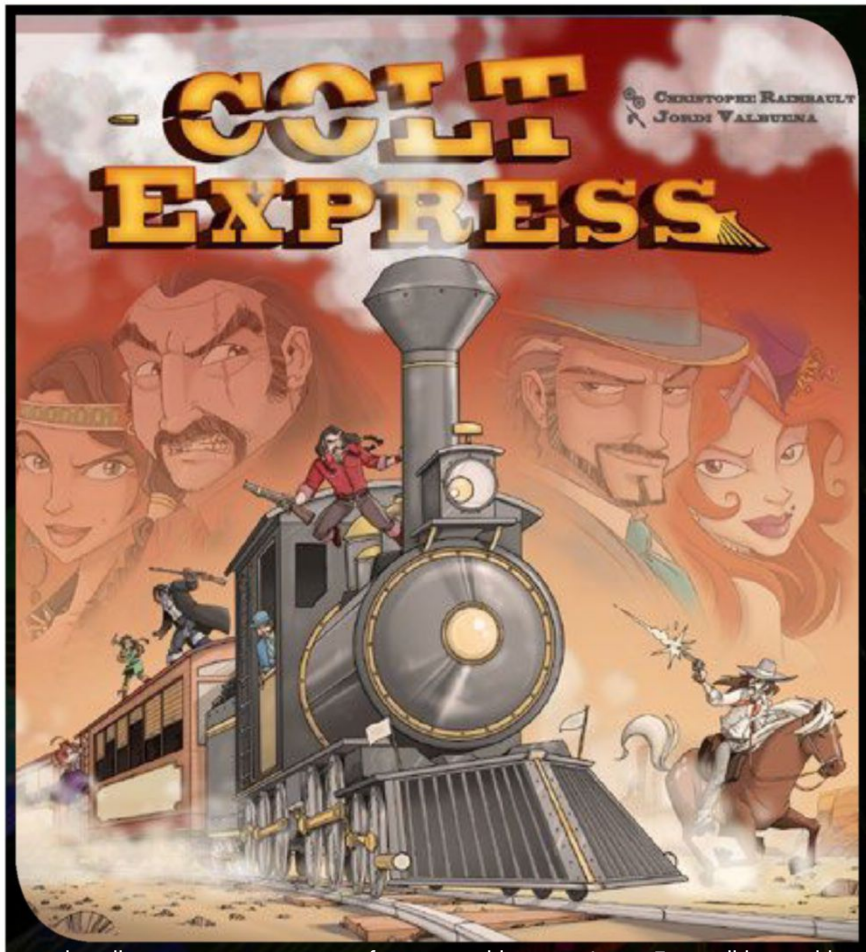
Any proudest moments?
That's an easy one. Getting 218 lines on Game Boy *Tetris*. I'm not sure whether you mean proudest gaming moments or proudest moments in life, but either way the answer is the same.

Retro vs. Modern: which one wins?
Old games have definitely been winning out recently. I've been playing a lot of old shooters like *Gunstar Heroes*, *Nam 1975* and *Metal Slug*. I've been going through a lot of old 8-bit classics recently, some real obscure ones too. I'm sure this will all change when I finally bite the bullet and join the current gen of consoles...

METAL SLUG

ROLL FOR DAMAGE

ED FORTUNE GUIDES YOU THROUGH THE REALM OF TABLETOP GAMING



The railways are a great source of inspiration for board game geeks. Not only do they have a romantic and historical image, they also tend to come with their own maps and layouts, all of which make for great source material for games designers.

So it may come as no surprise that here at the Secret STARBURST Thunderdome we play a lot of train-inspired games. Our current addiction is *Colt Express*, which won the Spiel des Jahres quite recently. (Basically, the SdJ is an Oscar for board games. It's a German prize, because Germans love their board games almost as much as Americans love their blockbuster movies.)

Colt Express is a train game that draws inspiration from the Wild West. You know that scene in *Indiana Jones and The Last Crusade* in which young Indie is running from carriage to carriage, fighting bad guys? It's basically that, but you're all bad guys. As a set-up for a game this is nothing new; James Ernest did something similar back in 2001 with his zombie-tastic game *The Great Brain Robbery*. However, whereas James' game was designed with a tight budget in mind and focused on shambling monsters and silliness, *Colt Express* is all about the action. The aim of the game is to get as much loot out of the train as possible. You're all meant to be train robbers who have inconveniently picked the same train to rob. Wackiness ensues.

The actual game board itself is a huge amount of fun. It's a model train! You have to clip the pieces together yourself, but only once. The box is designed so you can store the assembled pieces safely and they totally encourage you to get into the spirit of the thing. It comes with cacti and other desert decoration as well; these do nothing in the game but they add to the fun. The game cards have a nicely cartoon-like 'wild west' theme to them and the whole thing makes it very tempting to utter a 'yee-haw' before you even start.

Players place their little 'meeples' inside the back of the train and the game begins. Actions are driven by the cards you have in your hand; you pick up loot, shoot other robbers, climb onto the roof, and so on. The actions are programmed; everyone picks their actions and then we all go together. That means your plans to steal all the loot may not always go to plan. Each round is determined by an 'event' card that tells you how many actions the round has. It also adds wrinkles such as the train braking suddenly or going under a bridge. These have mechanical effects such as everyone getting shunted forward or certain actions being played face down, because it's dark. Each player also has a special ability that makes them even more unpredictable. These are little rules twiddles that can really change the outcome of each turn.

COLT EXPRESS (PHOTO: ANNE DAVIES)

COLT EXPRESS (PHOTO: ANNE DAVIES)

Of course, you may want to simply shoot or punch your opponents in order to get all the loot to yourself. This is not a combat game though; all that does is either move the enemy to another room or simply add a wound card to their hand. These slow you down; they take up a slot in your hand of action cards and represent you staggering around as you nurse your injuries. The fact that you can't actually die does mean this works quite well with kids. Even if everyone decides to gang up on the youngest player (you monsters!), that player can still play and have fun.

It's not just the bullets of your fellow criminals you have to watch out for; there's a sheriff on board. This keeper of justice starts the game at the front of the train, where some of the best loot happens to be. Each player can move the sheriff as an action, but as a rule it's a bad idea. The Sheriff will shoot anyone he can and can knock you on to the roof, where there's no loot.

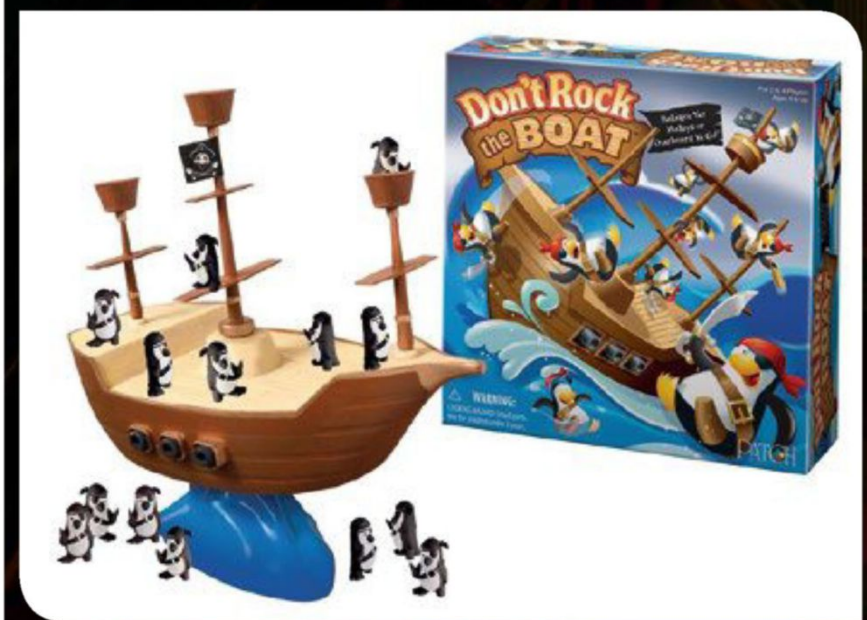
Compared to other games that use programmed actions, such as *RoboRally* or *404: Law Not Found,* this is more thematic and much more cartoon-like. It's in serious danger of knocking another Spiel des Jahres winner from the top spot in the Secret STARBURST Thunderdome.

I am of course, talking about *Ticket to Ride*. It's a very different game to *Colt Express*. It's all about trying to block your opponents from expanding their railway whilst garnishing your own. It's pretty much about collecting the right cards and placing the pieces in the most optimal place. I've gone on about it at length in the past and mention it now because it makes for an interesting contrast. They also work quite well together with *Colt Express* being a fun game to start a gaming sessions and *Ticket to Ride* being a nice one to end with.

It would be massively lax of me to talk about train games without talking about Martin Wallace. He's one of the world's top games designers and blimey does he love trains! His credits include *Steam, Age of Steam*, *Railways of the World*, and *Last Train to Wensleydale*.

If, however, you don't fancy those, there's always the *Ivor the Engine* board game...

And finally, I'd like to break the theme of this month's column to talk to you about penguins. I recently got my hands on *Don't Rock the Boat* from University Games. It's an absurdly simple game aimed at families. In the box is a great big plastic boat, which looks like a pirate ship. It also comes with many chunky plastic penguins. You may wonder why penguins need a boat? Well you see, they are pirate penguins. We can tell this because they all have eye-patches and tiny cutlasses. The ship (which is mostly brown and bronze) balances on a robust looking funnel, which you can imagine is the sea if you squint a bit. The aim of the game is simple; put the full queue of penguins onto the ship without it tipping over. It's a balancing game and an absurdly silly one. It's also totally amazing for getting kids into gaming. Maybe it's the penguins' piratical nature or the fact that it makes a great mess. I don't know, but blimey is it fun! Now, if I could only get these penguins to raid a train...



Ed Fortune can tweeted at **@ed_fortune** and contacted via **ed.fortune@starburstmagazine.com**

WATTO'S EMPORIUM

STUFF WE LIKED FROM AROUND THE WEB THIS MONTH WITH JACK BOTTOMLEY

EYE-POPPING PLAYING CARDS!

If your cinematic tastes are a little more extreme, why not invite your mates around for a game of poker with this stylish (and gruesome) Lucio Fulci branded deck of cards from **godsandmonstersrecords.com**? Limited to 300, this fabulous set comes from the people who brought us the video nasty-themed Lurid Trumps and scream quality, which, ironically, is something Maestro Fulci's films occasionally lacked. Presented in a stunning brushed steel box with an iconic (or is the *eye*-conic?) holographic image from **Zombie Flesh Eaters**, this is something horror fans will kill for!

LUCIO FULCI PLAYING CARDS - £20
AVAILABLE FROM GODSANDMONSTERSRECORDS.COM
PSYCHOTRONICSTORE.COM

THESE SHIRTS ARE ALL THE RAGE!

As T-shirts go, it is nice to have a bit of thought behind them; whether those thoughts are sane, however, is another issue. Sanity is certainly in question with this batch of shirts from **rageon.com**, which prove that the madder they are, the easier they sell. Obviously you can't beat the classics and we have a full torso Nic Cage shirt (no matter what he makes, the man will live forever thanks to meme makers). Then we get a bit crazier with a **Human Centipede** shirt... no, no, no let us finish... starring Kim Kardashian. Now is it unfair of us to say that this image pleases us a tad too much? And then, one of our personal favourites is the crazed crossover The Walking Toys Shirts, which takes ABC's hit **The Walking Dead** and recasts it with Pixar's **Toy Story** crew, with gruesome and hilarious results. Something tells us this won't be the direction **Toy Story 4** takes... more's the pity.

THE HUMAN CENTIPEDE KIM KARDASHIAN T-SHIRT - $29.99 USD
NIC CAGE T-SHIRT- $29.99 USD
THE WALKING TOYS- $29.99 USD
ALL AVAILABLE FROM RAGEON.COM

MERCH

GET READY FOR MORE FREDDY

If you've hacked through STARBURST's news section, you'll no doubt have heard that Freddy Krueger is returning to haunt the dreams of moviegoers once again, a mere 5 years on from the ugly (in more ways than one) Platinum Dunes remake. Freddy never dies but the folks over at **Beltsbucklestees.com** are putting that monstrous glove of his to far more positive use, with this neatly designed belt buckle. This ought to keep your trousers tight and warn off any potential threats in the process.

And if you are dead set against another desecration of Wes Craven's landmark film, the hell with the remakes, celebrate the original with the help of the guys over at **alltheheroes.co.uk**. Ok, so Freddy ain't no hero, but he is a horror icon, so why not pick up this very affordable vintage shirt featuring the man himself (as portrayed by the real Freddy Krueger, Robert Englund)! One, two, deals are coming to you…

NIGHTMARE ON ELM STREET (VINTAGE FREDDIE) T-SHIRT- £5.00. AVAILABLE FROM ALLTHEHEROES.CO.UK

FREDDY KRUEGER CLAW BELT BUCKLE - £15.00. AVAILABLE FROM BELTSBUCKLESTEES.COM

PHASERS AND SCREWS FOR YOU!

Ever thought, despite the fast advancing nature of modern technology, that your wildest (and in this case, geekiest) dreams aren't being met quickly enough? Well, clearly the folks at **The Wand Company** have, but they have decided to do something about it. "To boldly go where no man has gone before" if you will. And so, with that said, we present this absolutely wonderful replica **Star Trek** TV Series Phaser, which is a universal remote control compatible with most of your highest tech gear. This is a gift befitting the biggest Trekkie out there and is as faithfully designed as they come. Since debuting at San Diego Comic-Con in July 2014, it has been a rip-roaring success. Set Phasers to stunning.

However for those of you who prefer your explorations to be via TARDIS as opposed to Enterprise, then fear not, you are catered for too. In the Tenth Doctor's Sonic Screwdriver Universal Remote Control from the same glorious company. Previewed at San Diego Comic-Con in July 2013, this beautifully designed bit of kit was another hit (shock horror) and is now available at select retailers. Gesture-based and compatible with everything from your Blu-ray to your iPod, with a built in key code activated lock and voice guided set-up, this is so futuristic, even the Doctor himself might be tempted to upgrade his gear and add this to his collection!

STAR TREK PHASER UNIVERSAL REMOTE CONTROL - £199.95
DR. WHO SONIC SCREWDRIVER- £59.99
BOTH AVAILABLE FROM THEWANDCOMPANY.COM

GLASGOW COMIC CON

WORDS: ED FORTUNE
PHOTOS: ANNE DAVIES

Scotland has long been a hotbed for artistic and creative talent. When it comes to the world of comic books, a great many well regarded artists hail from Scotland. Add on top of this the fact that a big chunk of independent comic books come from the northerly bits of the UK, and it seems pretty obvious that Scotland needs some sort of comic book festival.

Glasgow Comic Con has come a long way since it started five years ago. From its humble beginnings as a small gathering of comic book fans assembled in an old church building to the industry recognised highlight of the comics calendar it is now, it's clear that the organisers have worked hard to keep the event friendly, accessible, engaging and above all, focused on one thing: comic books. *Glasgow Comic Con* is a 'traditional' comics convention, which means that the principle focus is on comic books over anything else.

The event was packed full of comic book creators from all over the country, and the general public came in droves to find the hot new reads. There were also a great number of panels, talks and workshops, with each one carefully picked to allow fans at every level of experience to find things out. This included extended interviews with the likes of Robbie Morrison and Jonathan Higgins, and even full panels featuring artists and creators. This was the sort of event where you could discover what it takes to work for the likes of Marvel, 2000 AD and DC, or simply hang out with some of the best talent in the UK today.

Highlights included an energetic and fascinating talk from Karrie Fransman, a creator who is constantly pushing the envelope of what sequential art can do and is always bringing her work to fresh audiences, helping everyone to enjoy comics. Running throughout the event was 'The Big Comic Draw', in which experienced artists were on hand to help members of the public explore drawing comics for themselves. At the start of the event the walls of the workshop space were quite bare but by the end we had a glorious collection of artistic experiments covering the walls. Other workshops included how to draw Manga and a very special workshop from Nigel Parkinson on how to draw in the style of *The Beano*.

The indie ethos permeated the entire event. A good example of this would be the cosplayers. At many 'comic cons' across the UK, you tend to see the same few things; people dressed as The Doctor, several Stormtroopers, some anime heroes and maybe a smattering of comic book characters from Marvel and DC. At *Glasgow Comic Con* we got all that, but many, many more comic book cosplayers, including more than a few costumes inspired by books such as *The Beano, The Wicked + The Divine* and *Saga*.

The event was split across three venues, all within easy walking distance of each other. This worked fairly well because it meant that people tended to pool together in lots of different areas, casually meeting up and chatting. Glasgow does have some fairly steep hills, but this didn't get in the way too much. Each venue was used to the fullest extent possible, especially the central location, the Centre for Contemporary Arts (CCA). This is a good venue, purpose built for helping people access art and this made a near-perfect venue for a comic convention.

Another key moment of the *Glasgow Comic Con* was the Scottish Independent Book Awards. Though part of the convention, the event was only accessible via a free ticket, and started later in the evening. It was a relaxed affair and STARBURST was honoured to present the Best Comic Award to Gary Chudleigh and Tanya Roberts for *Plagued - The Miranda Chronicles*, published by Black Hearted Press.

Overall, *Glasgow Comic Con* is an amazing event. Filled with a firm indie ethos, if you love comics and you find some of the larger UK comic conventions a little too crowded to be friendly, then you should consider making the trip to Scotland. The relaxed atmosphere and bone deep love of the medium means that even the shyest of fans will find a lot of joy. The team behind it produced a slick, well organised and extremely accessible event. We can't wait to go next year.

Edge -Lit.

WORDS:ED FORTUNE
PHOTOS:ANNE DAVIES

Derby-based genre literary festival **Edge Lit** gets stronger and more exciting every year. Now in its fourth year, the event continues to grow both in popularity and relevance to the community. As the name suggests, it's a literature festival; one that focuses on all things sci-fi, fantasy and horror. It's also a chance to rub shoulders with the great and the good from the UK's genre publishing industry.

For those who have not had the pleasure, **Edge Lit** is a one day event that is packed to the gills with authors, publishers, editors and fans. As usual, it was sold out. Though the venue means it will never have a massive crowd, those willing to plan and make the pilgrimage to Derby were well rewarded. It's a whole day affair; the first talk began at 10:30am and the last item on the schedule ended at 10:30pm. This is not your usual sort of festival, nor is it your usual genre event. For a start, no one was in a brightly coloured costume portraying their favourite literary character. This was all for the greater good as the people who turned up to show off their talent were the guests, namely some of the brightest and best from the UK book industry.

The event kicked off with a talk from *The Girl with All the Gifts* author M. R. (Mike) Carey. You may know him through his Felix Castor novels, or via comic book work for DC - he wrote the long-running hit series *Lucifer*. Carey also ran an excellent dialogue workshop in which he shared some insights into the movie version of *The Girl with All the Gifts*. Another early panel was 'Is Grimdark here to stay?', featuring Sophie Sparham, Adrian Tchaikovsky, Gav Thorpe, and Adele Wearing. What made the panel work was that the various speakers came from different approaches and backgrounds; each had their own idea as to what Grimdark is and how it's going to change over the years.

The entire thing took place in the Derby Quad; which happens to be just the right size for this sort of event. Plenty of room to put various small press traders and the like and lots of small rooms to host panels and workshops. The traders were scattered throughout the venue, which meant you didn't have to go far to see something new. At one point, it did feel like one of the rooms was entirely dedicated to book launches, mostly from the smaller press. This actually worked quite well; the specialist press tend to have very specific products and an opportunity to meet and greet the creators was very useful.

Other highlights included a superb panel featuring on the genre's relationship with its snooty cousin, Literary Fiction. Gollancz's Darren Nash did a great job of keeping Mike Carey, Claire North, Jenny Colgan, and Joanne Harris on topic. The authors had a lot to say about the state of the industry and it was a delight to see these top-level creators really get their teeth stuck into a topic. Workshops of note included an excellent talk on publishing contracts and some firm advice for wannabe editors.

Yet again, Sarah Pinborough was on hand for the raffle. On the one hand, this was a chance to win a pile of books for very little cash. In actual fact, it was an excuse to have a belly laugh at the whole industry, courtesy of the host. Pinborough's irreverent sense of humour and quick wit makes what would normally be a bit dull one of the key items on the schedule; the main hall was packed with raffle ticket holders who were there for the humour rather than the prize giving. Sarah was assisted by John Connolly, who was also on top form.

Edge Lit 4 was very much more of the same; each year the event gets slicker, the guests get better and the crowd becomes keener and more engaged. If books are your thing, then you must make sure you go next year.

PAUL MOUNT'S TV ZONE

This month we wander down to WAYWARD PINES, pick up a PENNY DREADFUL and hang out with HUMANS...

Episode five! If I was the sort of person given to random cussing, I'd have been tempted to leap out of my chair (although in actual fact, it would really be more of a gasping, creaking, groaning slow clambering to my feet) and shout 'WFT??'at no-one in particular except, possibly, the cat. Five episodes into Fox's sensationally-smart ten-part mystery thriller *Wayward Pines* and the gaff is well and truly blown. Although I knew it was coming, I still didn't *see* it coming. No long, drawn-out seven-season slow-build leading up to an apocalyptically disappointing resolution here (although I hear disquieting rumours of a second season); **Wayward Pines** deftly sets up its mystery, toys with it – and us – for a few weeks before throwing the covers off at the end of episode five as if to say 'Whaddya think of *that* then?' as we're still trying to take it all in. **Wayward Pines** is, fleetingly I suspect, my new TV best friend.

I pondered long and hard – something I'm not much given to doing – about how to approach **Wayward Pines** this month. Should I blow the series' Big Reveal (and woah, it's *really* big, folks!) just to fully explain quite how startlingly good it is? Do I have the right, as a famous Time Lord once so eloquently put it? Well yes, I do; this is my TV Zone and I'll do what I want in it. But this once, perhaps, I'll be uncharacteristically circumspect. I have little time for those who shriek 'spoilers!' when they read something they might not have wanted to about a film or series which is already in the public arena. If it's out there, it's fair game, that's my motto (and I agree it's a pretty stupid motto and I'm certainly not convinced by its familial lineage); but this time I'm going to keep my powder dry and dance around that Big Reveal – episode five! – because if you haven't watched **Wayward Pines** yet or if you're actually not planning on catching up with it (think again!) it really is better that you discover its crazy secrets on your own. **Wayward Pines** is just so good that you just won't get the best out of it if blabbermouth TV critics can't keep it zipped just this once.

Based on a trilogy of novels by Blake Crouch (the TV series wisely and broadly covers all three books rather than dragging a season or two out of each volume, as some lesser series might have been inclined to do) and stars Matt Dillon as US Secret Service agent Ethan Burke. His investigations into the disappearance of two fellow agents lead him to the peculiar wicket fence town of Wayward Pines, Idaho, which seems like an idyllic, homely paradise. Hospitalised with concussion following the car crash which led him to the town, Ethan meets the sinister psychiatrist Mr Jenkins (Toby Jones) and the even more sinister Nurse Pamela (Melissa Leo) but finds an unlikely ally in local bartender Beverly (Juliette Lewis) who is clearly as unsettled by the town as Ethan, although she's reluctant to tell him why. Ethan is troubled by a strange feeling that there's more to the town than meets the eye, which, combined with an inability to contact the outside world and the apparent reluctance of anyone to leave – and threats from local Sheriff Pope (Terrence Howard) – leads Ethan to decide to make a run for it. Ethan steals a car but discovers a huge electrified fence which surrounds the entire town...

This, my friends, is only the beginning of a really quite extraordinary ten weeks of utterly gripping television. The first few episodes subtly develop the mystery of Wayward Pines and its sanitised, compliant citizens, but we quickly discover that the town has a grim and unpleasant underbelly; those who don't comply with the town's rules are summarily executed at public ceremonies known as 'Reckonings', Ethan discovers that his old colleague Kate (Carla Gugino), one of the missing agents he's been looking for, is living in the town under a different identity and looking several years older than when he last saw her five weeks previously. Matters become even more complicated when his wife Theresa (Shannyn Sossamon) and teenage son Ben (Charlie Tahan) arrive in the town. Mystery piles upon mystery; what's the secret of the fence? Just who is the creepy Dr Jenkins? What hold does the apparently psychopathic Nurse Pamela have over the people of Wayward Pines? *What the Hell is going on here??*

I wish I could tell you more but, for your own good, that's as far as it goes. But the truth behind **Wayward Pines** – episode five, remember – is quite gobsmacking and it *will* knock you sideways. In some ways, it's utterly insane but it makes absolute sense within the skewed logic of the series itself. Yet unlike many shows which lose momentum once their cover is blown, **Wayward Pines** goes from strength to extraordinary strength

WAYWARD PINES

and by the time the chaotic final episode rolls around it's become as edge-of-the-seat as any **Breaking Bad** or **Game of Thrones** you might care to mention. The show takes what appears to be a worryingly derivative scenario – you'll be thinking **Twin Peaks**, **The Prisoner**, **Persons Unknown** for the first few weeks - and then makes you forget them all as it takes you on a journey you could never have expected. Matt Dillon, sometimes regarded as one of the infamous 'brat pack' of up-and-coming Hollywood types in the 1980s, is convincingly square-jawed as the determined Ethan but the terrific cast is really dominated by Toby Jones (most reliable and interesting actor in the UK, surely?) and Melissa Leo, whose performances are both inexplicably unsettling and absolutely mesmerising.

That's really all I can say about **Wayward Pines** and pretty much all I want to say. It's ten episodes of damned near perfect genre television – and I really don't want a sequel series, guys, even though I hear that exec producer M. Night Shyamalan has a 'cool' idea for a second run. Just do yourselves a favour; cancel everything, put down this magazine (once you've read it from cover to cover) and do everything in your power to track down **Wayward Pines** (it's just out on DVD – find a shop which still sells 'em, they're out there somewhere) and get stuck in. I think I can guarantee you won't regret a moment of the time spent in the weird world of **Wayward Pines**.

PENNY DREADFUL

Thank God for the word *macabre* because there's a good chance I'd be lost for words (no cheering at the back) trying to find a way to describe Showtime's **Penny Dreadful** (which has just concluded its second season on Sky Atlantic in the UK) without it. But maybe that's not quite true; there are a few other good 'uns which seem appropriate. **Penny Dreadful** can be shocking, weird, wilful, gruesome, grisly (yet not, oddly, particularly *scary*) – but above all else it's utterly compelling for all sorts of reasons, some of them probably quite wrong. The through-the-roof production values ensure that it's one of the most lavish and intricately-crafted series ever seen on TV and, fortunately, this second season has largely fixed some of the meandering narrative problems that plagued the first run to create a much more interesting and focused storyline.

PENNY DREADFUL

Penny Dreadful is cult viewing in its purest form; its viewing figures can only aspire towards the minuscule. But then this is its strength. It's not mainstream TV, it's aimed at a sharp, discerning audience who demand challenging, uncomfortable viewing with no concessions made to the easily offended or those of a nervous or timorous disposition. Taking its name from a particularly lurid form of nineteenth century serial literature, **Penny Dreadful** is a sort of mash-up of classic characters from Gothic fantasy, including Dorian Grey, Dr Frankenstein and his creatures, Van Helsing, the Murrays and Harkers from **Dracula**, Ethan Lawrence Talbot (aka Lawrence Talbot) and assorted vampires, demons and witches. In a Victorian London so beautifully realised it looks as if cast and crew have actually travelled back in time a hundred years or more to make it, the formidable Vanessa Ives (Eva Green) marshals together these disparate, tortured souls initially to battle a nest of vampires operating across London. Season One was a little random and meandering but the second season gave the show a stronger narrative line and more fulfilling arcs for its core cast. The troubled Vanessa is being tormented by Evelyn Poole (Helen McCrory), a professional spiritualist and leader of 'The Nightcomers', a coven of vile and malevolent witches, but everyone else has their demons to battle too and this year the show's various strands have come together impressively and everyone has had their moment in the spotlight. Green, always a magnetic screen presence much given to playing slightly insane, wide-eyed, extravagant nutjob women, is the thread that binds the show together and she is on top form throughout the series, whether possessed by unspeakable demons or learning to control her growing witchcraft abilities in the company of the Cut-Wife (Patti LuPone) in the deeply dark third episode flashback.

PENNY DREADFUL

Penny Dreadful is a rich, complex and gloriously opulent series. Showrunner/creator John Logan (who also scripts every episode) writes in a beautifully indulgent fashion, exploring the dark corners of the English language and giving his cast wonderful, evocative dialogue; everyone in the cast gets to let rip and show what they can do. Billie Piper, freed from the dodgy Irish accent she employed as consumptive prostitute Brona in the first series, is on surer RP ground in Season Two as the wily Lilly, Victor Frankenstein's second creature, whose development through the second season is perhaps the most fascinating. Initially a naïve and stumbling innocent reborn, she becomes a wily manipulator as she grows in confidence throughout the season. By the end of the run, she's established a formidable and blood-

drenched partnership with Dorian Grey and looks set to cause even more havoc in the recently-commissioned third season. Elsewhere in the cast, it's an embarrassment of riches with the brilliant Rory Kinnear as the tormented creature Caliban, Timothy Dalton at his career best as Sir Malcolm Murray, Josh Hartnett as Ethan Chandler/Talbot and the astounding Helen McCrory whose outward public persona as the charming Evelyn Poole hides a vile, ruthless witch who controls her victims with intricate dolls, given their own gruesome life courtesy of innards ripped from hapless souls slaughtered as she pursues her own plans for supreme power at all cost. The scene in episode two where she cuts the heart from a recently killed baby might be considered a line which should never really be crossed...

Penny Dreadful is a powerful and evocative show and one to revel in and embrace. It's sometimes tough to watch, yet its morbid delights are a bit like the stories and books which inspired its title; dark, guilty pleasures guaranteed to unnerve and intrigue rather than terrify. Season Two has ended with one enemy bested, another growing in power on the sidelines and Vanessa and her cohorts scattered to the ends of the Earth, alone and devastated by the cruel hands fate has dealt each of them. Sometimes the show might be too perverse (or even too perverted) for its own good but there's really never been anything quite so bold and stark on television and that alone is reason enough to invest time in the twisted world of John Logan's daring, taboo-busting fantasy. *Penny Brilliant*, you might say...

HUMANS

ALSO SCREENING

THE STRAIN

Season Two of the extreme and adrenalised vampire-virus-in-New-York drama, based on the trilogy of novels by Guillermo del Toro and Chuck Hogan and starring **Ant-Man** baddie Corey Stoll.

From August 26th on FX Channel.

ZOO

Animals across the world turn the tables and start launching random attacks on Mankind in this lavish and fanciful new US thirteen-episode series based on the best-seller by James Patterson.

Airing now on Sky One

FROM DUSK TILL DAWN

Second season of the elongated TV version of Robert Rodriguez's feature film moves into all-new territory for its sophomore season.

From August 26th on Netflix

HUMANS

Channel Four are rightly proud of the success of their Sunday night eight-part drama **Humans**; it's captivated around four million viewers a week, which is impressive enough in itself and especially astonishing for Channel Four. There'd be even more cause to celebrate if **Humans** was an entirely original series - it is, of course, based on the acclaimed 2012 Swedish drama **Real Humans** - but such concerns are ultimately swept away in a series which deftly nails the difficult problem of how to create a science fiction series which will appeal to an audience really not interested in the genre. I'd be willing to bet my secret stash of Wispa Golds that many of the show's audience didn't even realise they were watching a science fiction show until about episode four or five.

Set in the near future (no silver space suits, hovercars or jet-packs in sight) or a parallel-world present-day, **Humans** tells of a society which has become reliant on the domestic assistance of disturbingly realistic androids known as 'synths' and, across its taut, well-paced eight episodes, explores the potentially tenuous relationship between humankind and artificial intelligence and what might happen should the lines between the two become blurred. It is, dare I say it, about 'what it means to be human' as a group of synths, programmed with human feelings and sensibilities, battle for the right to stay truly sentient in a suspicious world, and fight to remain free as the scientific establishment and the more mundane authorities attempt to reign them in and deactivate them. The human/android conflict is beautifully explored in the relationship between the Hawkins family and their synth Anita (Gemma Chan); Anita's arrival drives a wedge between the family as mum Laura (Katherine Parkinson) is uncomfortable with the very idea of having a sleek, blank-faced synth gliding around the family home, daughter Mattie (Lucy Carless) is wary of the development of synth technology and intrigued by the humanity she sees in Anita, and Laura's husband Joe (Tom Goodman-Hill) and son Toby (Theo Stevenson) are captivated by the shapely Anita for slightly more mundane and predictable reasons. But the show also deals with the synths' right to endure as sentient creatures, it addresses the potential for a world where humans and synths might not necessarily be able to exist side-by-side and the unease of the scientific community, including one particular boffin who has his own plans for synth technology. **Humans** is science fiction by stealth, wrapping classic genre tropes and concepts in a familiar, modern-day and generally domestic environment and thereby tricking its audience into watching the sort of TV show it might normally avoid as if it were a new Piers Morgan series. But by creating a dynamic and recognisable family unit, populating the show with interesting, believable characters and telling a story that asks questions and yet never strays into the absurd, **Humans** quickly established itself as 'must-see' TV for a Sunday night crowd more used to cosy costume dramas and light and undemanding detective shows. Series One tied up many loose ends and yet paved the way for the inevitable second series next year; it'd be nice to think that **Humans** might yet remind commissioners that sci-fi can work on British TV if audiences aren't treated like imbeciles and the material is presented with intelligence, style and the wit and will to avoid the excesses and extravagance of the cultier end of the genre. Successful mainstream sci-fi on British TV which *isn't* **Doctor Who**; I was beginning to think I'd never see the day again...

*Contact me via the magic of email - **paul.mount@starburstmagazine.com** or do the Twitter thing - **@PMount***

it's only a movie

a column by JORDAN ROYCE

For clarification purposes, this is what somone being a bit of a twat looks like!

Back from some fun in New York and there were more than a few distractions from jet lag to be found this month. First up to bat we have a movie that I was concerned about. One that had been through development hell and had seen the departure of its key talent, Edgar Wright. Now with **Mad Max: Fury Road**, I thought I had watched my movie of the year, but I am really pleased to say that **Ant-Man** has pipped it to the post. Forget all the nonsense from The Daily Beast, and a pile of other snarky blog sites. **Ant-Man** is the most fun I have had at the cinema this year.

As a massive Marvel Comics fan, and a cheerleader for the **MCU**, I was worried that the departure of someone as pivotal as Edgar Wright would be a fatal blow. This character was (like **Iron Man** back in 2008) relatively unknown to the movie going masses. He is more than a little goofy as well. Even though in the comics he was one of the founding members of **The Avengers** (later replacing The Hulk as the muscle with both his Giant-Man and Goliath personas when the green guy got fed up and buggered off), and his initial adventures in **Tales to Astonish** are regarded as classics, transposing a shrunken guy with disproportionate strength, and the ability to communicate with his ant army sounded like a stretch. Surprisingly, like Mr Fantastic, Marvel Studios were more than up to the job.

There have been a few different portrayals of the character, but my favourite had been Dr Henry 'Hank' Pym. Together with Janet Van Dyne as The Wasp, they are the main characters from my youth. Along with the nineties came changes, and both D.C. and Marvel began replacing some characters with younger, more contemporary replacements. Along then came lovable rogue Scott Lang, and it is this version that is the **Ant-Man** featured in the movie. A fact that I was a little upset about, but I should not have worried. Along with Paul Rudd knocking it out of the park playing Lang in a comic performance that is pitch perfect, we have a very impressive turn by Michael Douglas as Pym. Providing an Obi-Wan to deliver the necessary training for Lang to take his place, in exchange for sorting out a rather large problem, even for a regular-sized bloke.

Ant-Man begins in a period not yet covered in the **MCU** – The late 80's. We find an amazingly well-digitised 'young' Michael Douglas handing in his notice to the S.H.I.E.L.D. board, including a middle-aged Peggy Carter, and John Slattery reprising his **Iron Man 2** role as the older Howard Stark. It's attention to detail like this that puts the **MCU** streets ahead in this genre. Backstory completed, we shoot ahead to **Ant-Man** origin mark two, and the introduction of Scott Lang.

It's actually difficult to convey how perfectly pitched the entire movie plays out from this point on. The cast are great, including Evangeline Lilly as Hope van Dyne, the daughter of Pym and Janet Van Dyne. Who, you might have figured out, will play a bigger role in subsequent outings. The story sparks along at a perfect pace, and the whole affair unfolds with a perfectly balanced sense of comic timing. Though, thankfully, never letting the comedy elements eclipse the unfolding story elements. Add to this a killer soundtrack, some of the best use of 3D since **Gravity**, and Marvel have done a superb job of sticking two fingers up at the naysayers.

Even some elements that I usually cannot stand play out with such originality that you wonder how they could have pulled this off with all the creative disruption. Case in point - The comedy sidekicks. Usually, I roll my eyes the moment characters like this make an appearance. The nadir being Rob Schneider's eye-torturing stint as Fergie in the Stallone **Judge Dredd** movie. Instead, the trio of Luis, Dave, and Kurt were a riot to watch, and the ongoing 'exposition' gag was comedy gold (no spin-off for them, though - please!). Even the annoying kid/exasperated ex-wife/dickhead stepdad triangle works.

Ant-Man is an extremely entertaining movie and a solid retelling of the classic **Pygmalion** story of a mentor trying to turn someone's life around. It's the best fun in the cinema I have had in ages, and it's difficult for me to find fault. It was also refreshing that unlike some of the recent Marvel movies, the cameos in **Ant-Man** do not leave the casual moviegoer feeling like they just crashed a private party, and this flick actually can serve as a jump-on point. I just think that any movie that manages to slot in a credible cameo from Thomas the Tank Engine is a flat out work of genius in my book!

I only wish I could be as accommodating towards **Terminator: Genisys** (It's taken me months to spell that right, and still I have to look twice). **The Terminator** is a VHS classic powered by word of mouth. **Terminator 2: Judgement Day** is a very important sci-fi movie that cemented both Arnie and James Cameron as box office

titans, and catapulted computer special effects into mainstream movies after which there was simply no turning back. **Terminator 3: Rise of the Machines** is a poor movie, the *Terminatrix* was rubbish, and it was saved only by a ballsy buzzkill of an ending. **Terminator: Salvation** is not only the worst Terminator movie, but it's also one of the worst sci-fi movies ever made. It turns out that fighting in a future of burnt rubble is nowhere near as involving, or interesting, as a duel between robots in a setting we find familiar and can connect with. It was a dreadful mess, dragged down even further by the atomic-powered shitness of Sam Worthlessness, and a cringe-worthy, heart-swapping ending. **Terminator: Genisys** sees Arnie back on board and was supposed to get the franchise back on track. To an extent, it does and it's actually better than some people have made out; but boy, does it have its problems!

The T-1000 finally catches up with Jai Courtney - Armed with a cease and desist order from the Actors' Equity Association

The first half starts out well by crossing over into the original movie and replaying scenes, with vastly different outcomes. This was a hell of an achievement considering the convoluted mess of four movies and a cancelled TV series. It's a clever way of rebooting, and it's a shame that they felt obliged to feature this twist in the trailer in an effort to fight the detractors. The clowns who were complaining that this movie was impossible to plot convincingly. The soundtrack is good, Arnie is on form (despite the usual ageist crap online), and the special effects are well up to the task. So where did it all go wrong?

Well, there was much discussion on Twitter, so I waded in with my summary of what I perceived to be the major problem. "Two words – Jai Courtney. He's a disaster. An expressionless lunk-head of epic proportions." And there it is. Well within the 140 character limit. After this movie, I'm now happy to name him officially the worst actor in motion picture history, actually dethroning the toxic mess that is Sam Worthlessness. Whether there is a gun thrust in his face or Emilia Clarke's vagina, this guy's expression remains fixed in rigor mortis. It isn't even a case of him being a *poor* actor – he is frikkin' incapable of acting. This guy will even need coaching at his parents' funerals. It was a disaster to let him loose in a lead role of this magnitude. It's like watching a blind man with amputated arms trying to win a Grand Prix. Emilia Clarke is nowhere near as bad (she *can* act), but is just too short and petite to be convincing in the action scenes. A fact exacerbated by the **Cops** gag (I bet that *actually* seemed like a good idea on paper!). I also didn't buy into the brand new T-3000 'Iron Filings' Terminator. Only the original T-800 or the quicksilver T-1000 do it for me I'm afraid...

The film does still manage to restart the saga skilfully, whilst avoiding some narrative cul-de-sacs, all the time navigating its way to the showdown in 2017. This is the point where the movie fizzles out for me, with all of the clever stuff already spent, and nothing new to offer.

Terminator: Genisys is really just the **Terminator: Greatest Hits Album**. You get just enough of what you liked about T1 and T2, and enough stunts, action, and special effects to distract you from Jai Courtney. Tragically, the quieter moments leave you to savour the type of performance you would expect from an aborted foetus.

I feel I must also throw in a few encouraging words about **Mission: Impossible - Rogue Nation**. If you like Bond movies or the previous **MI** instalments, you will love this. It's action the good old fashioned way. They don't make them like this anymore (except they just did). Go and see it on the IMAX for two hours and ten minutes that will have you saying "Jai Who?"

Aaand finally folks, over on the smaller screen (although not much smaller these days!) I got around to watching the first episode of the **Scream TV series**. Now, I have been pretty supportive of this film series from the get go. **Scream** was a very important movie, introducing a much-needed sense of self-awareness into a genre that had pretty much run its course. The sequels were still lots of fun, but **Scream 4** did not quite get the warm reception of its predecessors. I thought that was a bit harsh as **Scream 4** was still a fun revisit and was again a self-aware dig at reboots. Sadly, it is all too apparent towards the end that the dismal hack Ehren Kruger had something else in mind than the ending written by original **Scream** writer, Kevin Williamson. Would Sydney Prescott have been the killer, having lost the plot literally as a result of the trauma of the original trilogy?

Even by comparison with **Scream 4**, the **Scream TV series** is absolutely awful. It literally jumps the shark the minute it starts. The problem is it's that bad that it's almost hypnotic to watch. Even in the first ten minutes, the writer forgets about a severed head floating in a swimming pool. We are then introduced to a load of 2D teen fodder, the names of which you won't even remember once the credits hit the screen. In fact, only the cypher character that explains the whole geek side, and the punky-looking girl from **Arrow** remotely stand out. Then we hit the product placement aspect...

Having sat through some of the most hideous product placement EVER in **House of Cards**, I had thought things could not get any worse, then up pops this shonky load of nonsense. **MTV** in their wisdom has decided that every time a music track is played, a **Shazam**-type popup has to appear so that we can quickly purchase said tune. It seems to be a blatant attempt to push whatever playlist they have a vested interest in. It, therefore, goes without saying that Lakewood appears to have a permanent music festival on at the moment. Coffee Shop speakers, car stereos, lots of frat parties, etc. Any excuse is used to shoehorn in some songs and these bizarre popups. The jaw-dropper comes later on in the episode where they actually forgot to even justify the presence of the music and a song spontaneously plays whilst two of the cast are chatting sat in a rocking chair on the porch, with literally no sound equipment anywhere to be seen. Astonishing stuff. **Scream the TV series** is bloody terrible, and yet for some insane reason I can't wait to watch the next episode...

Jordan Royce can be contacted at
jordan.royce@starburstmagazine.com
Twitter: **@JordanMRoyce**
and hosts the Starburst Radio Show every Wednesday 9pm until 11pm GMT
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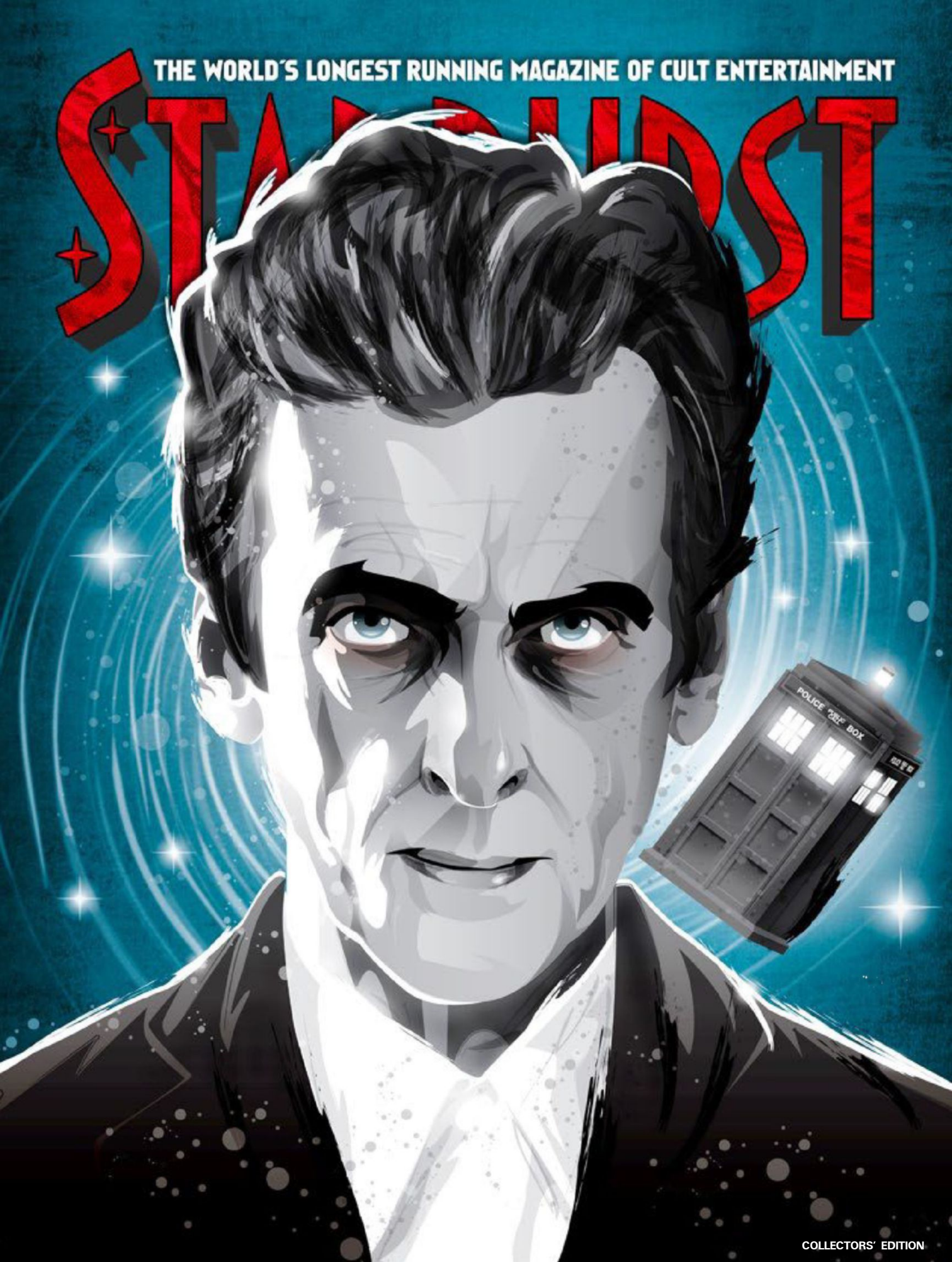

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